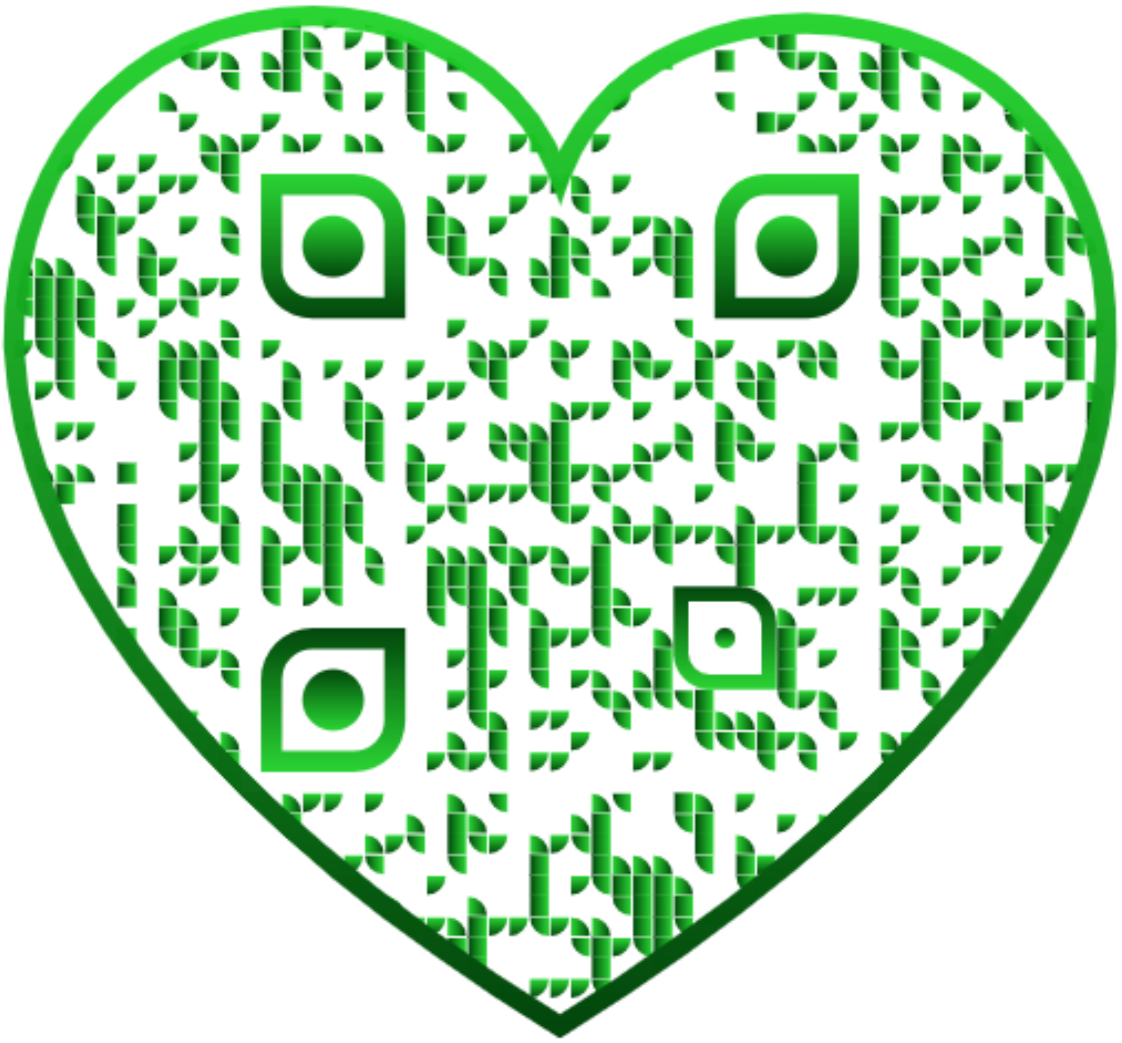
KYLIE MINOGUE / FLO MILLI / JIMMY BUTLER / SCORSESE ON ROBERTSON

Rolling Stone

OCTOBER 2023
ISSUE 1380

ALL EYES ON OLIVIA

A POP SUPERSTAR LEVELS UP — WITH THE WHOLE WORLD WATCHING



THE *Vintera™ II* SERIES

Vintage style for the modern era.

Fender®

©2023 FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORPORATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Scan to See More

Pets are domestic abuse survivors, too.

Purina helps create more safe spaces for domestic abuse survivors and their pets so they can escape and heal together.

PURINA® CARES HERE.

PURINA TRADEMARKS ARE OWNED BY SOCIÉTÉ DES PRODUITS NESTLÉ S.A.

Contents

34

All Eyes on Olivia Rodrigo

The 20-year-old superstar is ready to level up — with the whole world watching.
By Angie Martoccio

46

Visions of Robbie Robertson

Looking back on a remarkable friendship that began with *The Last Waltz* and lasted decades.
By Martin Scorsese

50

Trans Boxers Step Into the Ring

Athletes like Patricio Manuel want to fight. The question now: Will the sport let them in?
By Ben Wyatt

58

The Con, the Con Artist, and Me

Maverick Miles picked me to tell the story of his counterfeiting ring. I learned his lies run deep.
By Sean Williams

RS

ISSUE 1380

'ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS'

"If you can't handle the truth, that's your fucking problem."

Julia Fox
on her new memoir, *Down the Drain*

54

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Richie Shazam**

Contents

Opening Act

10 **Peso Pluma: Here to Save the Day**
The Mexican star shows us how he transforms into a superhero persona before he hits the stage.
BY TOMÁS MIER

The Mix

13 **Jorja Smith Gets Back to Her Roots**
The U.K. singer had to move back home to reach her full potential.
BY LARISHA PAUL

16 **Starting Up the Stones Again**
After nearly two decades and one tragic loss, they return with an all-new LP.
BY KORY GROW

23 **Introducing Holly Humberstone**
Her candid lyrics are winning fans quickly.
BY WAISS DAVID ARAMESH

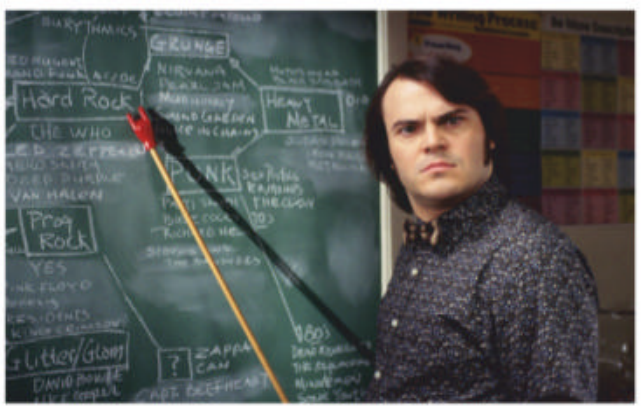
RS REPORTS
24 **The Punk-Rock Predator**
More than 12 victims have come forward with allegations against Anti-Flag singer Justin Sane.
BY CHEYENNE ROUNDTREE

28 **The World Is Still Kylie Minogue's**
Thanks to a global hit and a Vegas residency, the star is enjoying yet another career renaissance.
BY BRITTANY SPANOS

Q&A
31 **Flo Milli**
One of the most fun rappers alive on her four alter egos, love from Lil Wayne, and working it out at the rage room.
BY ANDRE GEE

Departments

Contributors 8
The Last Word 82



Reviews

Music

65 **The Sound of the '200 Percenters'**
New albums from pop star Becky G and singer-songwriter DannyLux explore the gorgeous complexities of growing up Mexican American.
BY JULYSSA LOPEZ

68 **The Ultimate Latin Rock Albums**
Sixty years of rock from Latin America — spanning sounds from psych-rock to tropicália, New Wave to grunge, and more.
BY ERNESTO LECHNER

Movies

70 **One Great Rock Movie Can Change the World**
The filmmakers and cast of *School of Rock* remember making the classic 2003 comedy as it turns 20.
BY ANGIE MARTOCCIO

On the Cover

Olivia Rodrigo photographed in Los Angeles on July 28 by **John Yuyi.**

Produced by Rhianna Rule. Photography direction by Emma Reeves. Styling by Jared Ellner for the Only Agency. Hair by Clayton Hawkins for A-Frame. Makeup by Yukari Bush. Nails by Yoko Sakakura. Tailoring by Carlos Ordoñez. Set design by Brittany Porter for Artistry Agency. Prop concept and collage creation by John Yuyi. Bodysuit by S/S 1998 Gianni Versace by Donatella, courtesy of TheRealList.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: EVELYN FREJA; © PARAMOUNT PICTURES; DON ARNOLD/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Diwang Valdez**

RollingStone

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

ONE YEAR *of* PRINT PLUS *for* $59.95

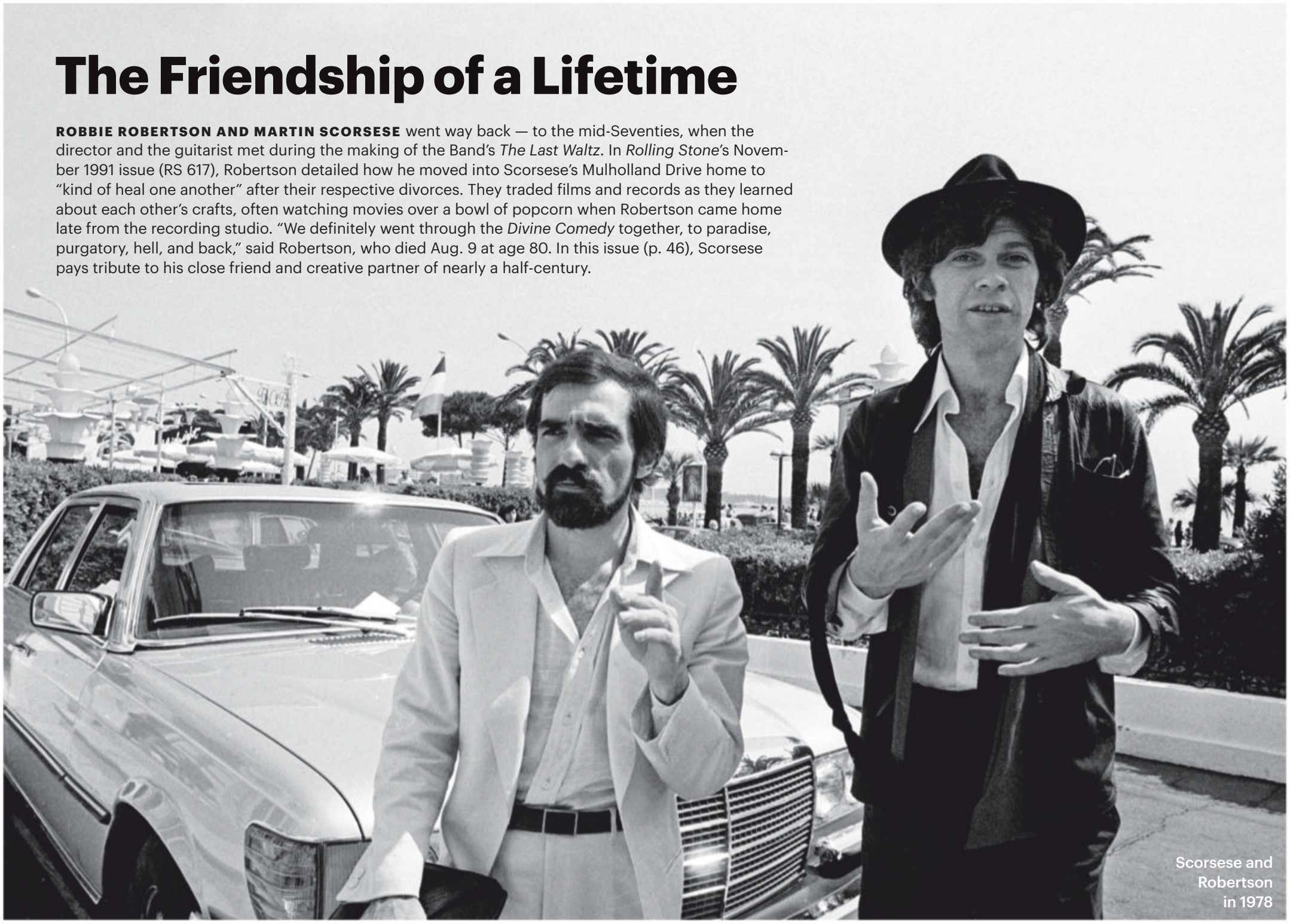
A year of print magazine mailed directly to your door. A year of E-edition delivered right to your inbox.

ROLLINGSTONE.COM/INTROOFFER

Contributors

The Friendship of a Lifetime

ROBBIE ROBERTSON AND MARTIN SCORSESE went way back — to the mid-Seventies, when the director and the guitarist met during the making of the Band's *The Last Waltz*. In *Rolling Stone*'s November 1991 issue (RS 617), Robertson detailed how he moved into Scorsese's Mulholland Drive home to "kind of heal one another" after their respective divorces. They traded films and records as they learned about each other's crafts, often watching movies over a bowl of popcorn when Robertson came home late from the recording studio. "We definitely went through the *Divine Comedy* together, to paradise, purgatory, hell, and back," said Robertson, who died Aug. 9 at age 80. In this issue (p. 46), Scorsese pays tribute to his close friend and creative partner of nearly a half-century.



Scorsese and Robertson in 1978

Behind Olivia Rodrigo's First Solo 'Rolling Stone' Cover Story

Angie Martoccio
Writer

When associate managing editor Angie Martoccio interviewed Olivia Rodrigo for this issue's cover story (p. 34), she found the 20-year-old superstar to be highly relatable. "I remembered what that age was like, when you're absorbing so much culture," she says. They found they have a lot of favorites in common, including a shared obsession with Patti Smith's quintessential coming-of-age-memoir, *Just Kids*. "I was like, 'You're right — it *is* incredible,'" Martoccio adds. A former RS intern who has been on staff since 2018, Martoccio wrote the February cover story on boygenius. She often writes about overlooked women in music, such as Michelle Phillips and Judee Sill; in this issue, she also spoke with the cast and crew of *School of Rock* as they celebrate the film's 20th anniversary.

John Yuyi
Conceptual artist

Rodrigo appears poised as ever in her cover photo, applying lipstick with a tiny portrait of herself printed just below the dark red tip. The surreal pop-art image has its roots in one of visual artist John Yuyi's own projects from 2019, where she tattooed images of herself onto different shades of Gucci lipstick. For this cover, the Taiwanese-born, New York-based artist wanted to illustrate some of the complex emotions that Rodrigo writes so well about in her songs. "Girls can't help having this joy of validation, of making sure they're pretty," Yuyi says. But as a woman who went viral with a social media campaign for Gucci when she was in her twenties, Yuyi recognizes the other side of the story, too: "No matter how pretty you are, you're still a normal human with insecurities," she adds.

Jared Ellner
Stylist and designer

Contributing fashion editor Jared Ellner wanted to explore the contradictions of Rodrigo's life right now. "It's a time where she is trying to be mature, but still youthful," Ellner says. As a stylist for Gen Z phenomenon Emma Chamberlain (whom he styled for the cover of our Creators Issue in May), Ellner is known for seamlessly guiding celebrities into new territory through fashion. Working with Rodrigo, he referenced the minimalist glam of Nineties grunge rockers, tapping into his background in design to push the physical limits of the pieces he found — like the classic black, rhinestone-studded Versace bodysuit from 1997 that Rodrigo rocks on the cover. Ellner hopes it's an outfit that the pop star will "be able to look back at in 20 years and still be proud of."

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: AP PHOTO; ROB KIM/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF JOHN YUYI; COURTESY OF JARED ELLNER

Rolling Stone

Noah Shachtman
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EXECUTIVE EDITOR — Sean Woods
CREATIVE DIRECTOR — Joseph Hutchinson
MANAGING EDITOR — Alison Weinflash
DIGITAL DIRECTOR — Lisa Tozzi
MUSIC EDITOR — Christian Hoard
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY & DEPUTY CREATIVE DIRECTOR — Emma Reeves
SENIOR FEATURES EDITOR — Kate Storey

NEWS DIRECTOR — Jason Newman
SENIOR POLITICS EDITOR — Patrick Reis
CULTURE EDITOR — Elisabeth Garber-Paul
DEPUTY MUSIC EDITOR — Simon Vozick-Levinson
SENIOR ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR — Marlow Stern
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR — David Fear
HEAD OF VIDEO — Kimberly Aleah
DIRECTOR, SOCIAL MEDIA — Waiss David Aramesh
CHIEF RESEARCH EDITOR — Brenna Ehrlich
ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR — Angie Martoccio

SENIOR MUSIC EDITORS — Jeff Ihaza, Julyssa Lopez
REVIEWS EDITOR — Jon Dolan
POLITICS EDITOR — Ryan Bort
SENIOR NEWS EDITORS — Jodi Guglielmi, Althea Legaspi
NEWS EDITOR — Charisma Madarang

SENIOR REPORTER — Nancy Dillon
SENIOR RESEARCHER & REPORTER — Adam Rawnsley
SENIOR POLITICS REPORTER — Asawin Suebsaeng
SENIOR ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER — Krystie Yandoli
ENTERTAINMENT INVESTIGATIONS REPORTER — Cheyenne Roundtree
POLITICAL NEWS REPORTER — Nikki McCann-Ramirez
RS COUNTRY EDITOR — Joseph Hudak
SENIOR WRITERS — David Browne, Tim Dickinson, EJ Dickson, Andy Greene, Kory Grow, Brian Hiatt, Alex Morris, Brittany Spanos, Tessa Stuart
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS — Jeff Goodell, Rob Sheffield
CHIEF TV CRITIC — Alan Sepinwall
STAFF WRITERS — Jon Blistein, Mankaprr Conteh, Andre Gee, CT Jones, Miles Klee, Daniel Kreps, Tomás Mier, Ethan Millman, Larisha Paul
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER — Kalia Richardson
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT — Maya Georgi

ART DIRECTOR — Matthew Cooley
DEPUTY ART DIRECTOR — Toby Fox
UX EDITOR — Nicole Thompson
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR — John Smith
DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR — Sacha Lecca
DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR FOR DIGITAL — Griffin Lotz
SENIOR VISUALS EDITOR — Joe Rodriguez
PHOTO EDITOR — Maria-Juliana Rojas

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION — Tara Reid
SUPERVISING PRODUCER, NEWS — Delisa Shannon
VIDEO PRODUCER — Ilana Woldenberg
SENIOR PRODUCER, ARTIST RELATIONS — Becca Higgins

VICE PRESIDENT, COMMERCE — Jessica Seib
E-COMMERCE WRITERS — Sage Anderson, Oscar Hartzog, John Lonsdale
FASHION & COMMERCE WRITER — Kyle Lamar Rice

SENIOR SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR — Leah Lu
ASSOCIATE SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR — Peter Wade
SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR — Elise Brisco

SENIOR RESEARCH EDITOR — Jonathan Bernstein
RESEARCH EDITORS — Rick Carp, Meagan Jordan
COPY EDITORS — Chris Kobiella, Jason Maxey, Steven Pearl

CONTRIBUTING FASHION EDITORS — Jared Ellner, Nicola Formichetti
CONTRIBUTING STYLE EDITOR — Alex Badia

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Cameron Crowe, Raoul Duke *(Sports)*, **Josh Eells, Mikal Gilmore, Erik Hedegaard, Will Hermes, Seth Hettena, Greil Marcus, Jason Motlagh, Paul Solotaroff, Ralph Steadman** *(Gardening)*

Ralph J. Gleason 1917-1975
Hunter S. Thompson 1937-2005

Gus Wenner
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

PUBLISHER, EVP HEAD OF GLOBAL BRAND PARTNERSHIPS — Brian Szejka
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER — Jessica Grill
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PROJECT MANAGEMENT — Sara Colchamiro
DIRECTOR OF EVENTS — Angela Gil
PARTNERSHIPS — Mitch Herskowitz, Brendan Hoey, Sabrina Phillips, Wendy Reiter, Christina Tom
MARKETING — Brandon Kosikov, Tessa Coan, Grace Troutman
PROJECT MANAGEMENT — Anna Viserto, Lindi DeGrant
ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT — Annie Quinn, Louisa Suyanto, Solomon Fortune
DESIGNER — Josie Bunce
BRANDED SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER — Julia Hardie
EVENTS COORDINATOR — Madeleine Caccavale
DIRECTOR OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT — Jason Fine
MANAGER, ROLLING STONE FILMS — Alexandra Dale
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, BRANDED — Christopher Cruz
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT — Yaasmiyn Alam

Jann S. Wenner
FOUNDER

NEW YORK OFFICE
475 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017
212.213.1900

LOS ANGELES OFFICE
11175 Santa Monica Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90025
310.321.5000

ROLLING STONE (ISSN 0035-791x) is published 12 times per year, which is subject to change at any time, by Penske Business Media, LLC, 475 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to ROLLING STONE Customer Service, P.O. Box 37505, Boone, IA 50037-0505. Canadian Postmaster: Send address changes and returns to P.O. Box 63, Malton CFC, Mississauga, Ontario L4T3B5. Canada Poste publication agreement #40683192. International Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 450553.

The entire contents of ROLLING STONE are copyright © 2023 by ROLLING STONE LLC, and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without written permission. All rights are reserved.

PMC

ROLLING STONE is owned and published by Penske Media Corporation

Jay Penske
CHAIRMAN & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

VICE CHAIRMAN — Gerry Byrne
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER — George Grobar
CHIEF ACCOUNTING OFFICER — Sarlina See
CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER — Craig Perreault
EVP, BUSINESS AFFAIRS AND CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER — Todd Greene
EVP, OPERATIONS AND FINANCE — Paul Rainey
EVP, OPERATIONS AND FINANCE — Tom Finn
EVP, PRODUCT AND ENGINEERING — Jenny Connelly
MANAGING DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL MARKETS — Debashish Ghosh
EVP, GM OF STRATEGIC INDUSTRY GROUP — Dan Owen
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, SUBSCRIPTIONS — David Robertson
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL — Judith R. Margolin
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE — Ken DelAlcazar
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES — Lauren Utecht
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT — Marissa O'Hare
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, CREATIVE — Nelson Anderson
VICE PRESIDENT AND ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL — Adrian White
VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES — Anne Doyle
VICE PRESIDENT, REVENUE OPERATIONS — Brian Levine
HEAD OF INDUSTRY, CPG AND HEALTH — Brian Vrabel
VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND STRATEGY — Brooke Jaffe
VICE PRESIDENT, SEO — Constance Ejuma
VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES — Courtney Goldstein
VICE PRESIDENT AND ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL — Dan Feinberg
HEAD OF LIVE EVENT PARTNERSHIPS — Doug Bandes
VICE PRESIDENT, AUDIENCE MARKETING & SPECIAL PROJECTS — Ellen Dealy
VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL TAX — Frank McCallick
VICE PRESIDENT, TECHNOLOGY — Gabriel Koen
VICE PRESIDENT, E-COMMERCE — Jamie Miles
HEAD OF INDUSTRY, TRAVEL — Jennifer Garber
VICE PRESIDENT, ACQUISITIONS AND OPERATIONS — Jerry Ruiz
VICE PRESIDENT, PRODUCTION OPERATIONS — Joni Antonacci
VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE — Karen Reed
VICE PRESIDENT, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY — Kay Swift
VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES — Keir McMullen
VICE PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ACQUISITIONS — Mike Ye
VICE PRESIDENT, PRODUCT DELIVERY — Nici Catton
VICE PRESIDENT, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND MARKETING OPERATIONS — Noemi Lazo
VICE PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL SALES — Richard Han
HEAD OF INDUSTRY, PERFORMANCE MARKETING — Scott Ginsberg
VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL — Sonal Jain
ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, EDITORIAL AND COMMERCE — Tim Chan
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR — Kevin Hurley
DIRECTOR, DISTRIBUTION — Mike Petre
IMAGING SPECIALIST — Germany Feng
PRODUCTION MANAGER — Anne Leonard

Opening Act

Here Comes Peso Pluma to Save the Day

WHEN HASSAN EMILIO KABANDE LAIJA puts on his ski mask and gold chains before shows, he transforms into the chart-topping hitmaker Peso Pluma. "The Peter Parker comparisons aren't a joke," he says with a laugh. "I convert myself into that superhero." (The spider-themed visuals during his shows help the fantasy.) The 24-year-old Mexican artist, whose blustery fusion of trap and corridos made him música Mexicana's breakout star, credits his mom with keeping him grounded; he recently flew her to L.A. to cook for him when he was craving her *sopa de fideo, machaca,* and *asado sinaloense*. "*Está cabrón*. There's no comparison to your mom's food," he adds. "Never, ever." TOMÁS MIER

Getting ready for a show in Inglewood, California, in July

PHOTOGRAPH BY **John Rodriguez** | **11**

START YOUR OWN GARAGE BAND.

REAL STIHL. Find yours at STIHLUSA.com

©2023 STIHL 23STFP1

The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

Listening to Her Heart

U.K. singer Jorja Smith had to leave London and move back home to reach her full potential

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Xavier Scott Marshall**

JORJA SMITH

JORJA SMITH isn't one to blindly follow her intuition. Sure, her gut has led her to some very good decisions, like the one she made in 2015 to move to London and pursue a career in music shortly after graduating high school. Within just a few years, the British singer and songwriter had star-making guest appearances with Drake and Kendrick Lamar, a coveted spot on the short list for the Mercury Prize, and a Best New Artist nomination at the 2019 Grammy Awards, next to acts like Dua Lipa and Luke Combs. Everything was lining up for her as one of the fastest-rising artists in R&B and pop.

Still, she says, she doubted herself, especially as she began to feel lonely in her new life. "When I put out my first album and then I went on tour, I was never around," Smith, 26, recalls. "I wasn't around family much, I wasn't really around my friends much." She longed for the familiar faces and places of Walsall, England, where she'd grown up. Back in London, Smith would often ask herself: "Why the hell am I here?"

For six years, she pushed that voice away – until 2021, when she finally listened to her gut, headed home to Walsall, and began working on her long-awaited second album, *Falling or Flying*, out now. It's an album that sees her taking a confident leap from a promising new artist to one who's in full command of her sound. "Really, I should just go off how I feel, because my gut feeling is actually always correct and I'll just be ignoring it," she says. "At the end of it, who does it all come down to? Me. And if I'm not happy, then what happens?"

Once she moved back to Walsall, the album began taking shape as Smith reconnected with the production duo DAMEDAME*, one of whose members she has known since she was 15 years old. In them, Smith found a new, intuitive way of tapping into joys that slipped away from her, like her love for playing piano. "There's so many things I stopped doing because I lived in the city," Smith says. "They really got me back into doing what I used to do." Suddenly, the singer wasn't booking studio time and crossing her fingers that something would emerge from a writing session. Most of the time, she says, the three of them were just chopping it up and cracking jokes over food.

She praises DAMEDAME*'s authentic quality: "I feel like they have that naiveté and they have much more of that inner child on the outside," Smith says. She compares that with the music industry in London, "where there's loads of opinions and what people think – they're not there. They don't have that other noise. Everything's just pure."

Smith says she'd never made a project like *Falling or Flying* before, one where she felt no pressure to do anything but be there in the moment. Her 2018 debut, *Lost & Found,* was essentially a compilation of songs she had written over the course of several years; *Be Right Back,* the EP she shared in 2021 to hold fans over while she worked on the new album, was made up of songs from the two years prior.

This time, Smith realized that if she wanted her music to reflect her current state of being, she couldn't dig through old files and find a portal into the future – she had to start from scratch. "I've stepped into being a woman in the making of it," she says. "Loads of songs are talking about other things, and then I'll sing them in the mirror and I'm like, 'Oh, this is about me.' "

On the upbeat, U.K.-garage-infused "Little Things," Smith sings about the rush of a new infatuation; on "Feelings," she shows off an easy chemistry with the British rapper and singer J Hus. But the album's emotional core comes through even more on songs like the brief, heartfelt ballad "Try and Fit In," where she advises someone who's going through burnout, or the acoustic-guitar-backed "Too Many Times," where she addresses the need to break unhealthy cycles in relationships. "Some of them I couldn't write because I hadn't been through what I needed to write about until last year," Smith says.

Smith valued her new collaborative partners' ability to keep her honest as they worked on this album. "J, I think you need to rewrite this one," she remembers DAMEDAME* telling her about one song. "I was like, 'Well, yeah, I do, because I was actually lying.' I needed to rewrite it because what I was writing about, I didn't want someone to hear. So I wrote a completely different song. And then as time passed, I was like, 'Fuck it. I'll write what I mean to say.' "

She also credits some of her creative breakthrough on this album to the three years she has spent consistently attending therapy. "I've just been able to look at myself differently," she says. "That's helped me let go. Honestly, I used to dwell on things or get obsessed with things in my head."

She says her newfound self-knowledge has helped her take more authority over her life and the choices she makes. "What I've noticed in the past, let's say I've said yes to certain things – whether it's a performance or something recorded. In my mind and heart, while I'm saying yes, I'm thinking, 'No, no, no. I know I shouldn't do this.' Then I do it, and all the things I felt when I wanted to say no I still feel." She doesn't get into specifics on those past choices, but it's clear that between therapy and collaborating with people who understand her deeply, Smith has shifted her entire worldview so her own feelings take the lead.

Whereas she might have been haunted in the past by what she should have said in an argument or how she should have stood up for herself, Smith now feels free to follow her musical inspiration. "Being in the studio making songs is the best place in the world," she says. "What people have to say about what I look like and that stuff – that doesn't affect the music. It just affects me, which is shit, but I'll get on with it."

When she's in Walsall, Smith feels untouchable. But she's also learning that her home is wherever she feels most at peace. "Home is just with people that make you feel like yourself. That's when I feel at home," she says, adding with a laugh: "So it can be in London, but I don't want to say that because I don't like London."

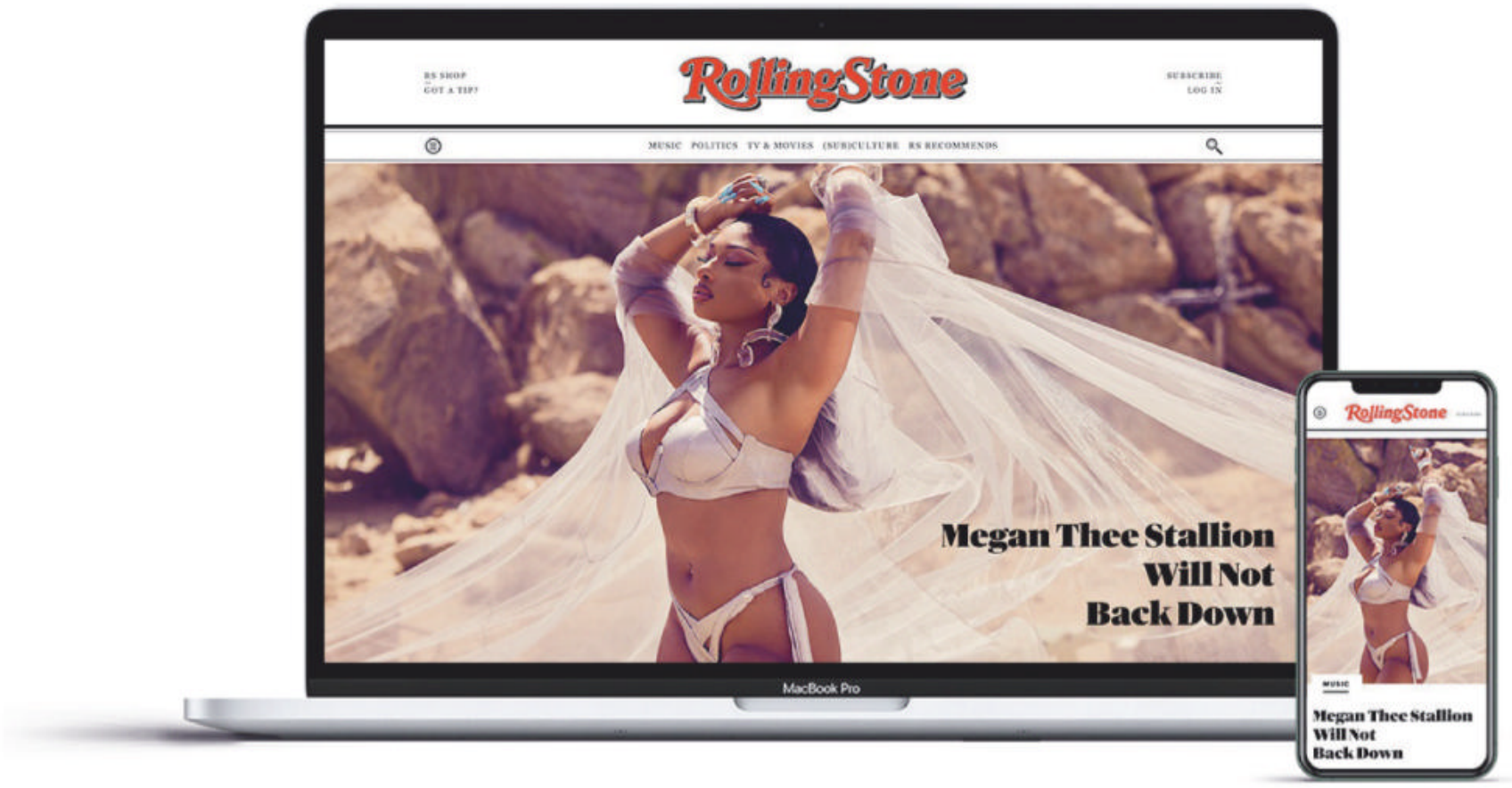
The headlining tour she's planning in support of *Falling or Flying* will take her out of her sanctuary, but she now knows she can bring that comfort with her. "That is my other safety bubble, because my crew and band, we're family," Smith adds. "That's like my other home. I feel like I'll just take all my energy that I'm storing here on the road. I always come back here." LARISHA PAUL

FAST FACTS

EARLY ASSIST
Audiences in the U.S. first got to know Smith when she was featured on Drake's 2017 project *More Life,* but it almost didn't happen: She's said she initially turned down Drake's offer to collaborate.

FROM THE START
Growing up in Walsall, Smith learned about music from her Jamaican-born dad, who sang in a neo-soul band. In her teens, she was a major Amy Winehouse fan.

HAIR BY DANIELLE IGOR USING DYSON HAIR AND IGOR HAIR. MAKEUP BY GRACE SINNOTT FOR FUTURE REPRESENTATION USING AUGUSTINUS BADER. NAILS BY PRIA BHAMRA. STYLING BY ALIZE DEMANGE. JACKET BY THRIFTY TOWEL. DRESS BY GEORGE TROCH. JEWELRY BY VRAI.



RollingStone

JOURNALISM *that* MATTERS.
MUSIC *that* INSPIRES.

Unlimited access to RollingStone.com
for just $59.99 a year.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

ROLLINGSTONE.COM/DIGITAL-OFFER

START THEM UP

The Rolling Stones, Now

Two decades and one tragic death since their last LP of originals, the band finally bangs out a new album

By KORY GROW

LAST YEAR, Mick Jagger started feeling restless. Seventeen years had passed since the Rolling Stones had released an album of original material, and though they'd toured regularly – and made the difficult choice to soldier on after the devastating 2021 death of drummer Charlie Watts – the on-and-off sessions they'd had for a potential new LP over the past decade hadn't produced much they could use. When the Stones' tour ended in Berlin last August, Jagger decided he'd had enough. So he pulled Keith Richards aside.

"I told Keith, 'I think some of the tracks are good, but most of them are not as good as they should be,' " Jagger says. " 'I think we should give ourselves a deadline [to finish recording], and then we should go out and tour the album.' And then he looked at me, and he said, 'Yeah, OK. That sounds like what we used to do.' "

"The thing started with Mick saying, 'It's important now that we make a record,' " Richards says. "I've always thought that, but I said, 'Well done, Mick.' " Richards laughs.

Jagger suggested a deadline of Valentine's Day 2023, a date Richards said was "a bit optimistic."

"I said, 'I know it's optimistic, but we've got to give it a date,' " Jagger says.

The sense of urgency made the difference. *Hackney Diamonds,* due on Oct. 20, spans the many styles the Stones have mastered in their six decades: hard rockers ("Angry"), disco rockers ("Mess It Up"), and country honks ("Dreamy Skies"). They included two tracks they recorded with Watts before his death, and the rest feature Steve Jordan, who's toured with them.

The record's guest list reads like popular music's Hall of Presidents: Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Elton John, Lady Gaga, and even self-exiled Stones bassist Bill Wyman. The album ends with only Jagger and Richards

THEN THERE WERE THREE Jagger, Richards, and Wood. The trio called in their old bandmate Bill Wyman for one song.

doing Muddy Waters' "Rollin' Stone," the blues staple that inspired the band's name. Somehow in their 61 years, they'd never recorded it.

The Stones speak glowingly of Jordan, but proceeding without Watts wasn't easy. "Anything I do is a tribute to Charlie Watts," Richards says. "It's impossible for me to lay anything down without thinking that Mr. Watts is laying the backbeat down. If you've got Charlie Watts on it, man, that's it. I so miss that, man."

The Stones pulled out Watts' two tracks, "Mess It Up" and "Live by the Sword," from their archive. For the latter, Jagger phoned up Bill Wyman. The bassist, who left the band in the early Nineties, agreed. "It's really sweet," Ron Wood says of having a reunion of sorts of the *Some Girls* lineup.

The Glimmer Twins decamped to Jamaica with Jordan and pianist Matt Clifford to write new songs. Meanwhile, they realized their go-to producer, Don Was, might not be available. "I was at dinner with Paul McCartney," Wood says, "and told him we need someone to boss us around. He said, 'Well, there's this young

© MARK SELIGER

New York boy, Andrew Watt. Give him a try.' " Unbeknownst to Wood, Jagger was already in touch with Watt, a 32-year-old whose credits range from Miley Cyrus to Ozzy Osbourne. With Watt helping, the Stones met their deadline.

Elton John became something of a session player, commanding boogie-woogie piano on "Get Close" and "Live by the Sword." The band invited Wonder in for "Sweet Sounds of Heaven," since it has a gospel feel. Wonder, who toured with the Stones in 1972, appreciated the reunion as a chance to reminisce over good times and pay tribute to Watts. Before they started recording, they jammed on a jazzy version of "Satisfaction," and then a reggae version. Then they got down to business, and Wonder played a traditional piano, a Fender Rhodes, and a Moog bass on "Heaven." The band transposed his bass line into a rousing horn section à la *Sticky Fingers*' "I Got the Blues."

"I felt that the song needed a place of celebration, a celebration of the spirit of the rhythms and the spirit of just everybody coming together for that event," Wonder says, adding how he was moved by how the song paid tribute to Watts. "It's not saying 'Goodbye,' to me, it's saying 'Hello.' "

Lady Gaga happened to be in the same studio at the time, and asked Jagger if she could watch them work. "She just walked in and just curled up in a ball in front of me on the floor," Jagger recalls of the "Sweet Sounds" session. "Someone gave her a mic, and she started singing *oohs* and *ahs*." It was off the cuff, but he liked it, and they did another session to tighten it up, singing while facing each other. "It just showed me how versatile she is," Wonder says. "It was great to hear her sing [with] sort of a soulful feeling."

Watt was already working with McCartney on another project in L.A. when Jagger asked his old friend to join the Stones in the studio. Jagger says that he'd sung and hung out with McCartney in the past, but had never recorded with McCartney on bass. "I didn't know what song to do," Jagger says. "And Andy said, 'Well, let's try him on your punk song, on 'Bite My Head Off.' "

"Paul said, 'Can you believe, here we are in the studio together?' " Wood says. "He said, 'I have a dream come true: I'm playing with the Rolling Stones.' He was like a kid in a toy shop."

So what does Jagger hope *Hackney Diamonds* says about the band that previous albums haven't? "This album is the Stones, but now," he says. "I just think it's the Stones this year."

Richards looks forward to developing the songs on the road. "Without anybody croaking or breaking a leg in the next year, I wouldn't be surprised at all [if we toured]," he says.

Sometimes, when Richards thinks about his age, he questions everything. "What the fuck am I doing? I'm 80 years old and playing rock & roll," he says. But those moments are fleeting. "[Usually] I don't think about age, or anything at all," he says jovially. (For the record, Richards is 79 and Jagger is 80.)

At the end of the day, Richards knows why the Rolling Stones still play rock & roll. "Who else can do it?" he says when asked what keeps him going. "If the Stones can't do it, nobody else can."

FROM THE MAKERS OF POO~POURRI

~POURRI

IT'S TIME TO

Put A Wrap On Holiday Funk

This holiday put a bow on festive funks *without* funky ingredients.

~Pourri odor eliminators are proven to flip the funk and remove odor from your home, life, and body.

★★★★★

LIMITED EDITION

holiday collection

Indulge in the scents of the season before they're gone!

20% OFF
Your First Purchase

pourri.com/rs

supernatural

HOME FEELS BETTER WITHOUT PLASTIC WASTE

20% OFF
Your First Purchase

supernatural.com/rs

Never Sacrifice Quality *For Sustainable Living*

PLANT-BASED CLEANERS • PURE ESSENTIAL OILS • REUSABLE SYSTEM

MASTER THE GAME OF LIFE

WITH FOUNDER & CEO SUZY BATIZ

20% OFF ALIVE OS

Discover the tools that catapulted Suzy into success with her transformative course, Alive OS.

20% OFF

alivewithsuzy.com/rs

20% off promotional offer is only available for a limited time, other exclusions may apply. Discounts will be reflected at checkout with the use of a promotional code provided via QR & links for offers in the above media. Cannot be combined with other offers, promotions, or applied to previous purchases. ~Pourri, Supernatural, and Alive reserve the right to end or modify promotional prices at any time. Exclusions apply. Offer subject to change. Offer valid while supplies last or until the expiration of promotion on 12/31/23 at 11:59 pm PST.

ADVERTISEMENT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

The Story Behind Suzy Batiz

How a CEO shaman is using feel good energy to manage an empire of passion.

INTERVIEW BY **CHRISTOPHER CRUZ**
PHOTOGRAPH BY **DANIEL N. JOHNSON**

Suzy Batiz is not your typical CEO and Entrepreneur. By harnessing the energy of intuition and transformation, she's used her passion and alive ideas to turn them into a multimillion-dollar empire. Rather than leaning on privilege, she proved herself a survivor – of sexual and domestic abuse, depression, and two bankruptcies - which led her to discover the power of pattern-breaking and the art of manifestation.

Fast-forward to more than a decade later, Suzy has used her entrepreneurial drive to build each of her brands [~Pourri, supernatural, and Alive OS] from the ground up and help others discover the strength and passion that already lives within them.

She's what you'd call "alive as shit."

Suzy sat down with Rolling Stone to discuss her story, the disarming power of humor, and why "hope" isn't enough •

CRUZ: The story of Poo-Pourri is something that feels straight out of Hollywood. How would you pitch it as a biopic?

BATIZ: The story of Poo-Pourri starts with a woman who was born without a lot of resources (internal and external), but now can somehow say, "[I] made it."

It happened by having a knowing within [me] and by letting a higher part of myself guide [me] to understand that there was always something more that I wasn't seeing or experiencing. I believed that I had it within [me] to create and build something that would help others.

I feel like it comes back to the idea that [our] internal knowing guides our story and empowers us to create our own destiny.

CRUZ: Is "empowerment" the central theme of your story?

BATIZ: Oh yeah, for sure. It's [empowerment] acknowledging that not everything is as it seems and accepting the circumstances you've been given. Once you do that, then you can fully dive in and discover your truest self.

CRUZ: What does it mean to be "alive as shit?"

BATIZ: It means to be filled with [a] purpose. Well, that word can be charged, right? So let's replace 'purpose' with passion - [alive as shit] means to be fulfilled in life; to be filled with the things that get you up in the morning, that turn you on, and lights you up. The name [ALIVE] stands for Abundance Lives in Vibrational Energy. When you can keep the vibration of that passion in its highest frequency, then it allows you to look at a piece of art and understand what the artist is telling you - you frequency, then it allows you to look at a piece of art and understand what the artist is telling you - you can feel that energy. It's the same thing with a product and how I run my businesses.

> **"Alive as shit means to be fulfilled in life."**

CRUZ: What's the first step to being truly alive?

BATIZ: The first thing would be to get real, really real. It starts by taking a step back to recognize and acknowledge, 'This is where I am [in life] and I don't feel passionate about it.' If you stay in denial and keep ignoring the problem, then you won't face [reality] it. Once you identify the problem, then you can make choices that will drive you [in] the direction you want to go. Hope is the biggest drug. I feel very passionate about turning the idea of 'hope' into real actions.

CRUZ: You've successfully used humor to remove the stigma from "bathroom talk." Why was that the key?

BATIZ: I have realized that humor is how we bridge the gap to taboo topics and the way to address a problem head on. It feels good to say, "Hey, shit happens! But let's face it, take care of it, and do it in the most fun way possible." We could have gone a different direction with Poo-Pourri but we wanted to replace the negative connotation around going to the bathroom and lead with humor instead.

CRUZ: You've completely disarmed people just by talking about shit.

BATIZ: I think when you approach people with the truth in a kind way, then it is undeniable. If you are speaking from your heart, then it allows people to let their guard down. No one likes to be sold [into] something. They hate it. It's the idea of a used car salesman. You go up and you're like, 'Oh shit, here we go. They're going to try and sell me the car I don't want.' [It's that] versus someone or something that stops and listens, identifies the true issue you are having, then really tries to help solve it. I think that idea is very empowering for a brand and people.

CRUZ: Never content in a single lane, I hear you're now breaking into music.

BATIZ: Yeah, so my partner is a musician [Preacher]. [We] fell in love and it's this magical, crazy story in that all the words we're saying to each other, we would just start writing down!

So, we have thirty songs right now that we're writing and they're incredible, because [they] also contain the energy of that. It's so authentic.

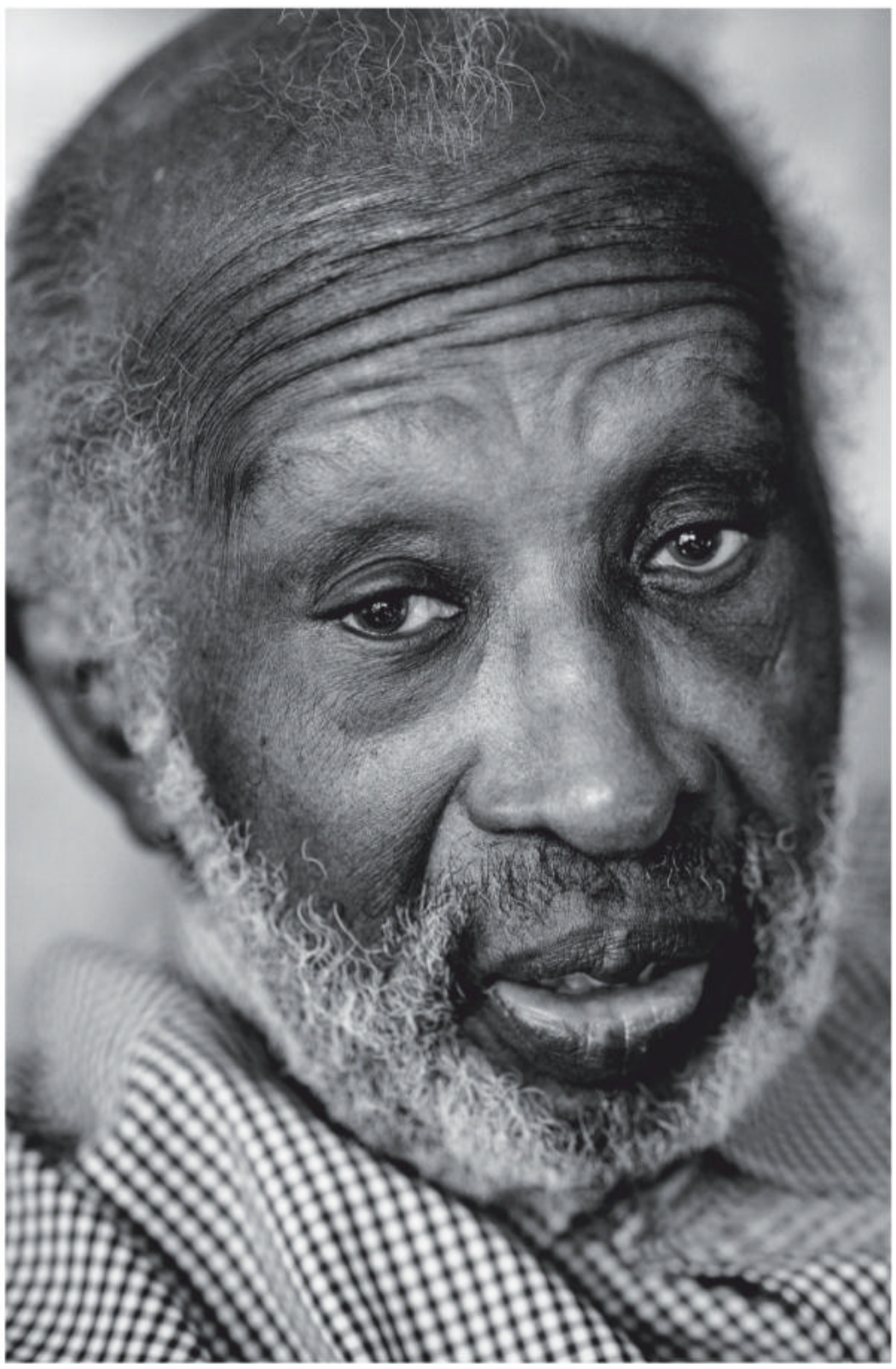
We're writing three albums right now and it's amazing. I'm really writing my story •

ICON

Remembering My Dad, the Black Godfather

My father, the music executive Clarence Avant, shaped the sound of more than 50 years of American popular music and my life. But even he needed a little help from his friends

BY NICOLE AVANT



COURTESY OF THE AVANT FAMILY

IN THE MIDDLE of August this year, three legends of the music industry died within 72 hours of each other: founder of A&M Records Jerry Moss; music lawyer Abe Somer; and my father, the "Black Godfather" himself, Clarence Avant. These three men helped define the recording industry of the past six decades, and what's more, they were inseparable best friends.

Somer, Moss, and Avant met in New York City in the early 1960s, and in the six decades since, never left one another's side, never once let their "soul contract" expire. The synchronicity of them passing in the space of just a few days makes me wonder if they simply couldn't face being on the planet when one of the others was gone – that's how close they were.

Abe Somer's career includes almost too many highlights to list: He helped Lou Adler create the Monterey Pop Festival, where Somer's guest that weekend, Clive Davis, heard Janis Joplin and subsequently signed her; Somer's pal, Jerry Moss, signed Joe Cocker after Somer and Moss attended Woodstock together; and in 1971, Somer helped the Rolling Stones ink the then-biggest music contract ever, securing for the band a deal worth $1 million plus 10 percent royalty per album. The roster of other musicians whose careers he helped may never be matched: Beyond the Stones, there were the Beach Boys, the Mamas and the Papas, Neil Diamond, the Doors.

Jerry Moss and Herb Alpert had established A&M Records in 1962 (Abe Somer would go on to be A&M's counsel for many years). Like Somer's list of clients, Moss' roll call of acts on A&M is Hall of Fame level: a very partial list would include the Carpenters, Cat Stevens, Supertramp, the Sex Pistols (for one week only!), Sting and the Police, Suzanne Vega, Janet Jackson, Bryan Adams, the Go-Go's, Burt Bacharach, Barry White, Sheryl Crow … and on and on.

As for my dad, well, he was part manager, part mentor, part power broker; a consultant, consigliere, and counselor, and most of all, a trailblazer, helping the careers of the likes of Lalo Schifrin, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, L.A. Reid and Babyface, Alexander O'Neal, Hank Aaron, Jim Brown, Andrew Young, Bill Clinton – like Somer and Moss, the recipients of his influence could fill this magazine's pages.

After he opened the envelope and saw the check, my father sat in his car sobbing; he didn't have problems, he had friends.

My father first revealed the power of his famous negotiating skills in the late 1960s, when he brought Moss the chance to sign a legendary jazz producer, Creed Taylor, to A&M. Moss pointed out that Taylor was already signed elsewhere for $35,000 – comically ignoring that minor issue of an established contract, my father asked for a total package of $450,000 for Creed, and Moss ponied up.

Establishing his own label in 1969, Sussex Records (named, puckishly, from a mixture of "success" and "sex"), my father helped bring Bill Withers to prominence, as well as Sixto Rodriguez (who also, sadly, died recently), as well as a host of white acts, including Dennis Coffey and his seminal track, "Scorpio." It was rare for a Black-run label to include white artists like Coffey, and the Gallery, who gave my father his first Number One hit ("It's So Nice to Be With You"), but as he says in *The Black Godfather,* the Netflix documentary we made about his life, "Who gives a shit what he is? It's music."

But by the mid-Seventies my father would overextend himself, establishing the only Black-owned radio station in Los Angeles at the time, KAGB, but he didn't know enough about radio to make it work. Money problems quickly piled up. He could no longer pay Withers, who left Sussex; this broke my father's heart, and mine (I had already been devastated at Bill's wedding when I, at age five, had realized he wouldn't in fact be marrying me). My family faced losing our house, our entire world.

And that's when my father would stumble upon his mantra:

"I don't have problems – I have friends."

ONE DAY in the middle of my father's looming financial implosion, Moss called him.

"Come over," he said, "I need you to look at a contract … "

My father drove from our home in Trousdale Estates to the A&M lot, but

The Best

New

This

SCAN TO SHOP

shop.rollingstone.com

when my dad arrived, suddenly Moss didn't want him to look at the contract after all. "Read it when you get home," Moss said, handing my dad a large manila envelope.

"You made me drive all the way across town and now you don't want me to read it?" Clarence said, ignoring the fact that our house was less than 15 minutes from Jerry's on North LaBrea.

Once my dad got in his car and drove away, a nagging feeling that something was off caused him to pull over to a side street off of Sunset. There, he opened the envelope and found what appeared to be nothing more than a fake contract ... as well as a smaller envelope, inside which was a check, and a note from Jerry Moss:

"Clarence: Take care of your family. Pay us back when you're ready. We love you. Jerry and Herb."

My father sat in his car sobbing; he didn't have problems, he had friends. Along with significant help from a host of other dear industry buddies, Moss and Alpert's act of extreme love and generosity helped my father save our world and go on to establish Tabu Records in 1975. Eventually my father – a man who grew up in the Jim Crow South, picked cotton and tobacco from the age of six, and was poor enough that he'd had to eat chicken-feet soup and carry a single sweet potato to school for his lunch – would become chairman of the board at Motown Records, support various political campaigns, and eventually become a dear friend to Barack and Michelle Obama. (He paid all his friends back, too.) As Pharrell Williams said in homage: "He is the ultimate example of what change looks like ... and what the success of change looks like.... He was a godfather to the Black dream and a godfather to the American dream."

FAMILY AFFAIR
Above: Moss, Somer, Avant (from left) together in May. Left: The author with her brother and parents.

SOMETIME in the late Sixties, Abe Somer had brought my parents to a party hosted by Dinah Shore in the Trousdale Estates, a secluded corner in the north of Beverly Hills. My father, loving its energy because it reminded him of his childhood home in North Carolina, declared that night that if he ever could afford to live there, he would.

But in the late Sixties, Black folks lived in Baldwin Hills, not Beverly Hills. My father's boss at the time, talent manager Joe Glaser, urged my dad to buy a place in Trousdale anyway – he even fronted my father the down payment. When Glaser died in 1969, my father figured he'd have to pay the estate back, until Glaser's (and Al Capone's!) lawyer, Sidney Korshak, called my dad, said, "The loan is forgiven," and abruptly hung up.

Somer subsequently helped my father build Sussex Records and assisted in orchestrating the deals with Withers, Coffey, and Rodriguez. But Somer was also a staple in my life growing up – he always showed up. When, in December 2020, my mother, Jacqueline Avant, was shot by an intruder in that very house in Trousdale, Somer and Moss were the first people at my home after she died. Their presence let me know that however I was feeling at the devastating loss of my mother, we would all get through this together.

I've recently written a book, *Think You'll Be Happy,* about my mother's life, and dealing with grief, and though my focus in that book has been on telling her story and helping readers move positively through loss with grit, grace, and gratitude, my father and his circle of friends figure heavily, too. I was so fortunate to grow up with these titans in my life; they were creative and larger-than-life and pushed even us kids to excel.

Moss, especially, realized early that music was everything to me: One night in 1981, he came to our house for one of his regular dinner dates, and at some point during the meal, asked me, then newly a teenager, what I wanted to be when I was older.

"I just want to really be my own girl," I said, paraphrasing Stevie Nicks and Tom Petty. From that moment on, impressed by my burgeoning self-confidence, Moss would send me gift boxes filled with pressings of his forthcoming releases, including records by the band that came to be my favorite of all, the Police. It was Moss who took me to the Hollywood Park Racetrack on Oct. 6, 1983, to attend their *Synchronicity* tour (he'd earlier taken me to the *Ghost in the Machine* tour, too). There I was, 15 years old, mouthing the words to my favorite song of all, "Tea in the Sahara," while my parents looked on, taken aback, by my word-for-word knowledge of every single Sting song. At one point I turned to Moss, and quoting the lyrics of "Tea in the Sahara," asked "What do you think it is that the 'sisters and I' wish for before they die?"

Moss said, "One day you're going to come work for me."

And I did. At the start of my career I would work for A&M Records in R&B promotions and marketing, in the same lot where Moss had handed my father the check that had saved my family. As for that incredible act of generosity to my family, Moss always said that he wasn't about to let his friends sink, which dovetailed nicely with my mother's mantra that we would sink or swim together as a family, just as it inspired my own, too (well, mine is stolen from – who else? – Sting). It's a mantra I've had to lean on heavily after the twin heartbreaking losses of my mother and father: "When the world is running down, you make the best of what's still around."

As of May 2023, though, at least the three wise men of music, Moss, Somer, and Avant, were still around. That month, they and their extended families gathered at Moss' house for his 88th-birthday celebration. Still dapper in a silk shirt and jacket, Moss remained an impressive figure – well over six feet, still sparkling, still handsome, still charismatic. Across the table from him sat Somer, and next to him, my father, who, though still deeply mourning the loss of my mother, was able to at least try to be his usual, puckish self, employing swears like the rest of us use prepositions. Though we didn't know it at the time, this was to be the final scene of this extraordinary buddy movie – just three months later these three men, whose friendship had never wavered, and who had been at the vanguard of the music business for the past 60 years, would be gone.

At one point that day, I saw my father fussing in the space between himself and Moss, and I wondered if he'd dropped his napkin or spilled some food ... but no – he had simply slipped his hand in Moss', and there they sat, for the next half an hour, holding onto each other like kindergarten besties. Now, faced with their imminent end, they sat quietly in the love of each other one last time, neither of them having problems, just friends. ®

NICOLE AVANT *is the author of "Think You'll Be Happy," published by Harper Collins on Oct. 17.*

COURTESY OF THE AVANT FAMILY

ARTIST YOU NEED TO KNOW

A Big New Voice in U.K. Pop Music

HOLLY HUMBERSTONE is pretty sure the house where she grew up, in the English countryside, is haunted. "There's this huge basement and just spiders and frogs down there," says Humberstone, 23. She and her three sisters let their imaginations run wild there while their parents stayed busy as National Health Service medics: "It was like our own little universe."

These days, Humberstone is making a name for herself as one of the most candid new songwriters in pop music. On her debut album, *Paint My Bedroom Black,* she builds on the diaristic storytelling of her early EPs with full-on love songs like "Kissing in Swimming Pools," about a real-life relationship. Humberstone admits she took some dramatic liberties writing the lyrics to that song: "I don't think anybody I know has a swimming pool," she admits. "I guess I properly fell in love, which is really cool."

As far as her travels take her, Humberstone always comes back to family — and specifically, to sisterhood. "If I dig down to the core of why I do things, I'm probably just doing it to impress my sisters," she says, citing songs like her debut single, "Deep End," and the new "Elvis Impersonators." "Their approval is above everyone's."

WAISS DAVID ARAMESH

10-SECOND BIO

HOMETOWN
Grantham, England

BIG SIS
Last year, she opened for Olivia Rodrigo on tour, which she calls "inspiring": "She just writes perfect pop songs, in my opinion."

MAKEUP BY ELENA MIGLINO. STYLING BY AMY HOLDEN-BROWN. LOOK BY CORMIO. JEWELRY BY JUSTINE CLENQUET.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Evelyn Freja**

RS REPORTS

The Punk-Rock Predator

Anti-Flag suddenly broke up after frontman Justin Sane was accused of rape. Twelve more women have accused the singer of predatory behavior, sexual assault, and statutory rape

By CHEYENNE ROUNDTREE

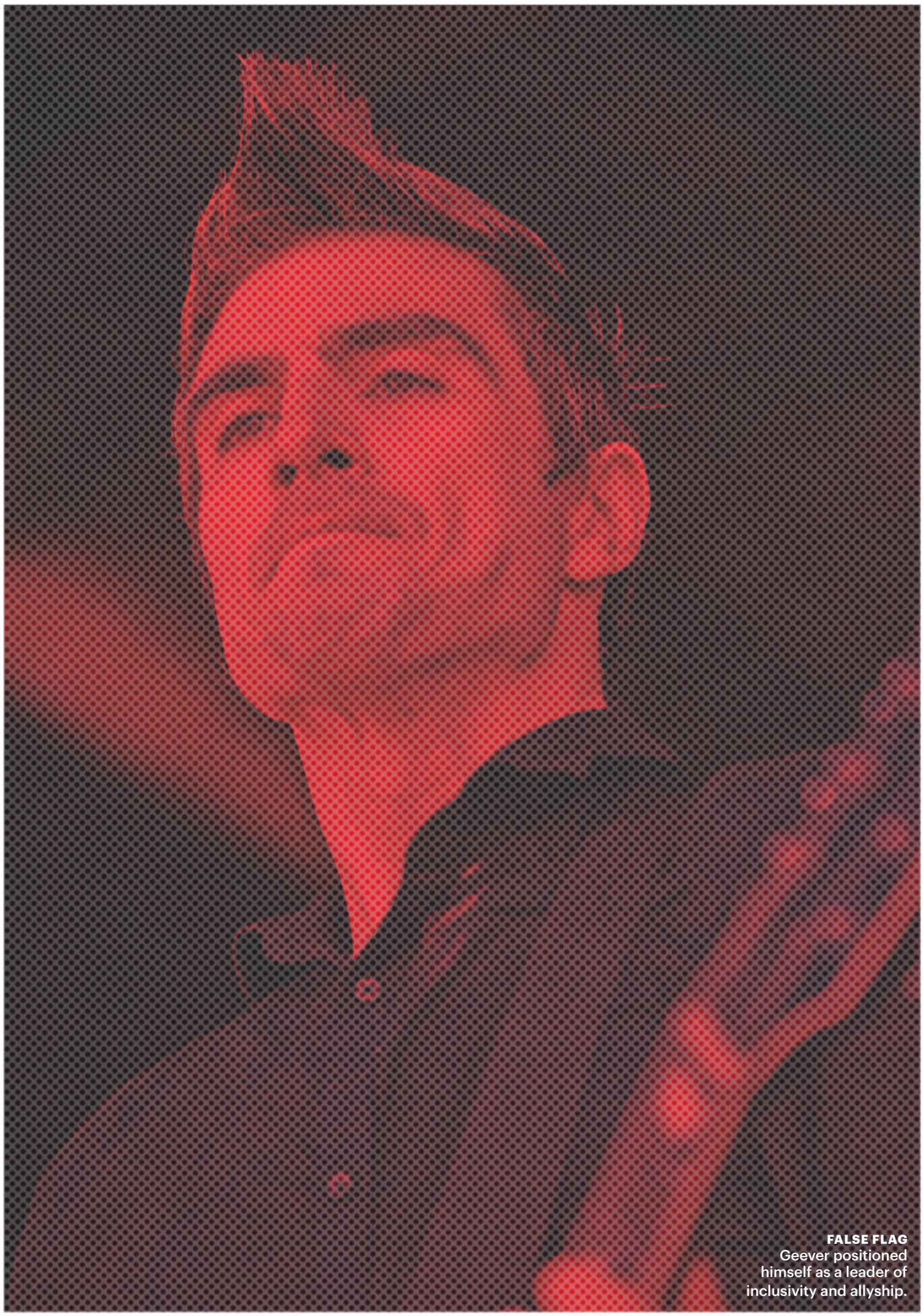
IF THERE WAS one punk group that positioned itself as a leader of a movement for inclusivity, radical change, and allyship in the early 2000s, it was Anti-Flag.

Co-founded by Justin Geever, a.k.a. Justin Sane, in Pittsburgh in 1993, members flitted in and out until the group solidified in 1999. Anti-Flag would go on to draw legions of devoted fans for their progressive messaging and political activism, including anti-war causes and animal-rights advocacy.

Geever served as the face, voice, and outward idealism of the group for decades. The band was proud to declare itself a safe space for people of all walks of life, especially women, and became vocal supporters of survivors of violent crime after the murder of a band member's sister. That idealism would also become a central tenet to some of Geever's lyrics. "This is what a feminist looks like!" he sings on 2005's "Feminism Is for Everybody," followed immediately by "This is what a feminist sounds like!"

Knowing what the band meant to so many, Kristina Sarhadi was sickened by the burden that she could shatter fans' entire faith in the group. The New York holistic therapist and health coach had been a die-hard fan until a fall 2010 night with Geever. "It's been this internal battle for me for over a decade," Sarhadi tells ROLLING STONE. "I truly believed his persona, and what [the band] were always consistently, persistently singing and talking about. I didn't want to be the one to take that away from anyone else."

But in mid-July, Sarhadi appeared on a podcast to accuse the 50-year-old



FALSE FLAG Geever positioned himself as a leader of inclusivity and allyship.

CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE

Entertainment investigations reporter CHEYENNE ROUNDTREE *wrote about Kanye West's Yeezy in the January issue.*

of violent sexual assault. Although Sarhadi did not name Geever directly, all details pointed to him. (Sarhadi confirmed to ROLLING STONE that Geever was the subject of the allegation.) Hours later, Anti-Flag wiped its social media presence – including band members' personal pages – and released a short statement. "Announcement," read the post. "Anti-Flag has disbanded."

Despite having multiple upcoming European shows, the group broke up immediately. Instead of acknowledging the accusation, though, the band offered no denial or further explanation. The assault claim contradicted everything Anti-Flag and Geever claimed to stand for. Now, when faced with their own reckoning, there was only silence.

A week later, Geever categorically denied the allegation. "I have never engaged in a sexual relationship that was not consensual, nor have I ever been approached by a woman after a sexual encounter and been told I had in any way acted without her consent or violated her in any way," he wrote.

The other members – Patrick Bollinger, a.k.a. Pat Thetic, Chris Head, and Chris Barker, a.k.a. Chris No. 2 – released a statement alongside Geever, saying they were "shaken" and "heartbroken" by the accusation, adding it has always been their "core tenet" to believe survivors. "Therefore, we felt the only immediate option was to disband," they wrote. "While we believe this is extremely serious, in the last 30 years we have never seen Justin be violent or aggressive toward women."

Ella claims Geever began kissing her and performed a sex act on her. "He definitely wanted to go further," she says. "But I was like, 'I have to leave, my mom is coming to pick me up.'"

Sarhadi's claim, however, is echoed by an additional 12 women who spoke to ROLLING STONE about their alleged encounters with Geever, going back to the 1990s and as recently as 2020. These allegations include predatory behavior, sexual assault, and statutory rape, including sexual relations with a 12-year-old when Geever was a teenager. (Geever did not reply to multiple requests for comment after ROLLING STONE sent him a detailed list of allegations for this article.)

"He was a wolf in sheep's clothing," says Jenn, who met Geever as a 16-year-old in 1997. (ROLLING STONE is identifying Jenn by her first name.) "He came across as super supportive. He was like, 'Yeah, we need more girls in punk rock,' and 'Get out there!' He played the part of lifting women up, but at the same time, he was holding them down, literally."

Sarhadi couldn't believe the night she was having. A seemingly fated encounter with Geever had led the then-22-year-old to a glamorous film festival afterparty as Geever's guest, who was now introducing her to various movie producers and music figures as his girlfriend. Hours later, she would wish she never attended the party.

The two had met a few days earlier when Sarhadi snagged tickets to the band's show in Brooklyn. Geever locked eyes with her from the stage, she says, and approached her after the show. While chatting, Geever mentioned he'd be near her hometown for the festival, Sarhadi says, and the two exchanged numbers. The pair met up, but instead of the dinner Geever had originally mentioned, she says, he asked her to drive them to the party.

Throughout the night, Sarhadi says, she rebuffed Geever's advances – including him trying to persuade her to climb into the car's back seat to have sex. Sarhadi says she was dropping Geever off at his hotel when he asked her to go to his room to hear a new song he recorded. Sarhadi claims Geever wanted to make a pit stop at the hotel bar, which was surprising because both were straight edge. But Geever allegedly told Sarhadi he was drinking that night because he was going through a personal issue with his fiancée.

Sarhadi followed suit, and together they drank beers and took shots before heading upstairs, Sarhadi says, to listen to the song. Once inside the room, Sarhadi says, Geever locked the door and playfully tackled her on the bed. "But as soon as I hit the bed, he put his hand around my throat and basically turned into a monster," she described on the *Enough* podcast. "To this day, I still have flashes of his face above me, holding me down."

Geever proceeded to sexually assault her, Sarhadi claims. "It went on for a very long time," she added on the podcast. "It was the most terrifying thing I've ever experienced. I can't stress how violent he was and how much I fully believed I was going to die, that he was going to kill me." (ROLLING STONE spoke with a friend of Sarhadi who said she had told them about the alleged assault earlier this year when discussing their bad experiences with men in the punk scene. Two of Sarhadi's family members tell ROLLING STONE they learned about the alleged assault a few weeks before the podcast aired, as Sarhadi was preparing to come forward.)

AS SARHADI'S STORY spread following her podcast appearance, numerous women began connecting with one another online about their own alleged encounters with Geever. Like Sarhadi, most women had been ardent fans of Anti-Flag, collecting posters, T-shirts, and CDs, and traveling to multiple shows as often as possible.

"I didn't say anything for a variety of reasons," Molly Newborn says of her 1999 run-in with Geever, who allegedly tried to kiss the then-17-year-old when he was 26 and bring her back to his hotel room after she said she was a virgin. "But a big one would probably be: I don't think people would believe it, that this guy is a creepo, because he sings about feminism," she says.

"I had no idea it happened to anyone else," Sarhadi adds. "I felt stupid, embarrassed, and confused, because how could it have happened with this person? He is the anti-rape singer. They are the outspoken feminist band who released an album benefiting women victims of crime. It doesn't make any sense. [But] even in nature, the worst predators have the best camouflage."

Anti-Flag's mission was clear from their 1996 debut album, *Die for the Government*. "We were angry about Gulf War Syndrome, where chemical weapons were used and the government tried to hide the fact," Geever said in 2009. "It was a giant 'Fuck you' for allowing innocent people to suffer."

The band began to take off with the release of its second album, *A New Kind of Army,* in 1999 and joined the Warped Tour – the behemoth summer festival that helped popularize the punk-revival scene – a year later. Throughout the early and mid-2000s, Anti-Flag grew a sizable younger fan base, with many of the people who spoke for this article crediting the band in shaping their own identities and beliefs in a time of post-9/11 political uncertainty. Even after the Warped Tour's dissolution in 2019, the band continued to tour to sold-out shows in the U.S. and Europe.

Geever readily lived up to the position of Anti-Flag's frontman. He was engaging and articulate in interviews, bouncing from Donald Trump to the evils of capitalism and his work as a board member of the nonprofit Punk Rock Saves Lives. With fans, he was approachable and generous with his time, taking photos and doling out free merch. It didn't hurt that Geever's boyish good looks followed him past his forties.

"[Anti-Flag] felt unique, a 'fuck the patriarchy and fuck the system, burn it all down' kind of thing," early fan Rebecca, who is being identified by her first name, explains. Geever was the "charismatic guy onstage, sharing these thoughts that were so moving," she says. "He presented as a safe person that had your back [and] was on your side."

For Suzanne, who discovered Anti-Flag as a teen, and others, the band's lyrics and politics were a road map in forming her own beliefs. "Their ideas and progressive way of thinking [were] so enlightening to me," she says. "I really looked to that band and punk rock as who I wanted to be." (ROLLING STONE is identifying Suzanne by her middle name.)

So it seemed like a pinch-me moment straight out of a rom-com, Sarhadi, Suzanne, and many others say, when Geever zeroed in on them from the stage and sought them out after a show to strike up an enthusiastic conversation. "It was like, 'Holy shit,'" says Suzanne, who met Geever at the band's spring 2002 show in Cleveland. "This is a band I idolize. How is he interested in me? I didn't really believe it."

The two began dating shortly after that first meeting, Suzanne says, with Geever allegedly taking several solo trips to her Arizona hometown, professing his love for her and taking the 17-year-old's virginity outside of a car. (ROLLING STONE has reviewed a photo of Suzanne and Geever alongside letters Suzanne says he sent her. Suzanne's close friend from high school tells ROLLING STONE she met Geever several times while he was dating Suzanne.) To her mother, Suzanne says, there were no obvious red flags – Geever claimed that he was 19. He was actually 30.

"It makes me sick," Suzanne says. "I think that I was groomed. He took advantage of his status and me being young."

GEEVER'S ALLEGED PREDATORY behavior was a direct contradiction to what he was proclaiming publicly, even going out of his way to condemn others in the scene. In 2017, he backed

a protester who went up against the Dickies frontman Leonard Graves Phillips with a sign that read, "Teen girls deserve respect, not gross jokes from disgusting old men! Punk shouldn't be predatory." "I do happen to share their point of view," he told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "My point of view is that sexualizing women and calling them the c-word is not something that should be tolerated."

Five months later, Geever was allegedly sending a stream of sexual messages to French college student Mat, who tells ROLLING STONE that she had approached him for help on a paper about feminism and the place of women in punk-rock music. (Mat is being identified by a variation of her first name.)

Given how vocal Geever was about championing women, Mat – a fan of the band – hoped to interview him for the project. While Geever said he couldn't help – citing a busy tour schedule – Mat was pleasantly surprised when he continued to message her about their interests and his family health struggles. The two rapidly developed an intimate friendship.

Within two months, Mat says, Geever began implying they would start a life together in the United States. Thoughtful conversations about their days and interests gave way to Geever repeatedly making sexual requests. "I remember one day I talked to him about some problems in my family that were important to me at that moment," Mat says. "He just said, 'Oh, OK, I'm sorry for you. I'm horny, can you call?' "

They finally met in person when Geever was touring Europe with Anti-Flag in June 2018. After driving to Luxembourg with her parents, Mat says, Geever took her back to his hotel and later that night initiated sex, which Mat describes as rough. "I was just like a statue," she says, adding that he choked and spat on her without consent. "I had the feeling that he was having sex alone with me."

The next morning, Mat says, instead of spending quality time together at breakfast, Geever was more concerned about rushing back to the hotel to have sex again before she had to leave. (That morning, Mat says, Geever admitted he had a girlfriend, but downplayed the seriousness of the relationship.) Afterward, Geever allegedly insisted that she shower, and said the next time she shouldn't come with her parents. Days later, despite Geever saying he believed there was a future between them, Mat says Geever abruptly cut things off. "I spent months thinking I was stupid, I wasn't enough, or I was bad in bed," Mat says. "I felt like an object."

Mat and Suzanne are two of 13 women ROLLING STONE spoke with who claim Geever exploited the power he wielded with younger, enamored girls and women for his own sexual gratification, with several saying they were disturbed to recognize their own experiences mirrored in Sarhadi's account. Seven of the women were teenagers at the time of their encounters. An eighth was 12 years old.

Susie, who is using a variation of her birth name, claims she was 15 when Geever – then 35 – took her virginity when the band was playing in Germany in August 2008, following the release of their seventh album, *The Bright Lights of America*. The two had met at another European Anti-Flag gig, and Susie claims Geever recognized and greeted her when she turned up to the German show. He allegedly took her to a shed on the concert grounds, where they had sex. "He told me not to tell anyone afterwards," Susie claims. (A friend who was at the show confirmed to ROLLING STONE that Geever and Susie were alone for some time that day, acknowledging she knew "something" had occurred between the pair.)

Three years later, Susie says, she received an email from Geever, who she sporadically kept in touch with. In the July 2011 email, reviewed by ROLLING STONE, Geever mentions he's playing at the same venue in Germany again, and how he was reminded of Susie and the "little shack where we spent some time together." "That night was very memorable," the email reads. "I know that it must have been a lot for you to handle – I hope that looking back it's a good and not a bad memory for you."

Another woman, Stefanie, says she felt Geever was attracted to her being an inexperienced 21-year-old when they began a sexual relationship in 2012. (ROLLING STONE is identifying Stefanie by her middle name.) He was charming and repeatedly professed his strong feelings for her, Stefanie says, which she now feels was a form of manipulation to get her to comply or be open to more extreme sexual acts. "He said, 'I'm so dominant in bed, but so sweet otherwise,' " Stefanie claims, adding that Geever forced her to call him "master" while she was the "slave." In one instance, she claims, Geever's mood shifted and he put his hands around her throat. Stefanie says she became frightened and began to cry, to which Geever stopped and apologized to her. (A friend of Stefanie's who was aware of their relationship tells ROLLING STONE that Stefanie told her about the incident soon after it happened.)

"We never talked about BDSM stuff," Stefanie says. "We never talked about that kind of dominance. He once texted me something [about domination fantasies], and I told him that I didn't like it."

Karina and Rebecca, who both dated Geever when they were teenagers, say they could relate to Sarhadi's description of Geever's attentiveness and kindness vanishing when the encounter turned sexual. "I was one among many made to feel special, manipulated, pressured, and then just thrown to the side of the road," says Karina, who is using a pseudonym and described herself as sexually inexperienced when she began dating Geever at age 16, right as Anti-Flag was taking off. (Geever was 23 at the time.) She developed an eating disorder and blamed herself for not being able to hold Geever's attention, she says, after he had convinced her it was OK for him to have sex with other women. When they were together, Karina says, her sexual encounters with Geever would "physically escalate" with no discussion or regard for her comfort.

"Later I learned, that's not the way it should be," Karina says. "That's not a way to show love."

"It makes me sick," Suzanne says. "It was like, 'Holy shit.' This is a band I idolize. How is he interested in me? I didn't really believe it. I think that I was groomed. He took advantage of his status and me being young."

THREE WOMEN say their encounters with Geever escalated from predatory circumstances to violent assault. Ella, who is using a variation of her middle name, claims Geever made sexual advances on her as a teen. The two met when she was 16, on the Warped Tour in Maryland, in the summer of 2009. Mingling among the grounds, Ella says, she ran into Geever – then 36 – who allegedly asked her age before saying he was "thinking of doing something dumb" and asking for her phone number.

Hours later, they met up after Geever messaged her, she says, with Geever allegedly taking her into a wooded area off-site. Ella claims Geever began kissing her and performed a sex act on her. "He definitely wanted to go further," she says. "But I was like, 'I have to leave, my mom is coming to pick me up.' " Ella claims that upon going their separate ways, Geever told her not to say anything.

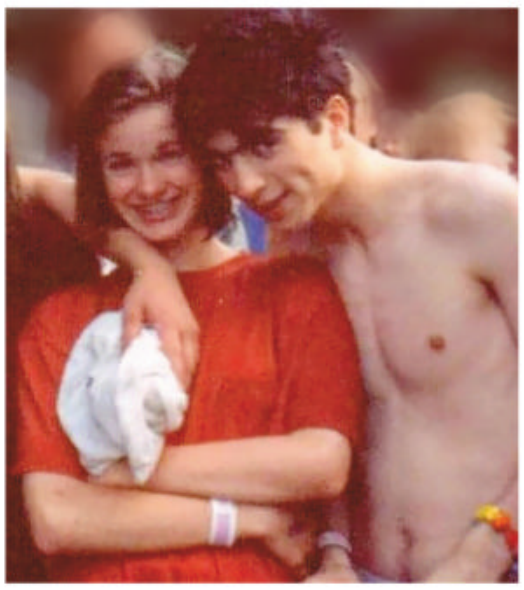
The two occasionally kept in contact. Four years later, following a 2013 Anti-Flag show in Baltimore, Ella says, she and Geever had sex. She describes the encounter as consensual, but says Geever repeatedly asked if she was a virgin.

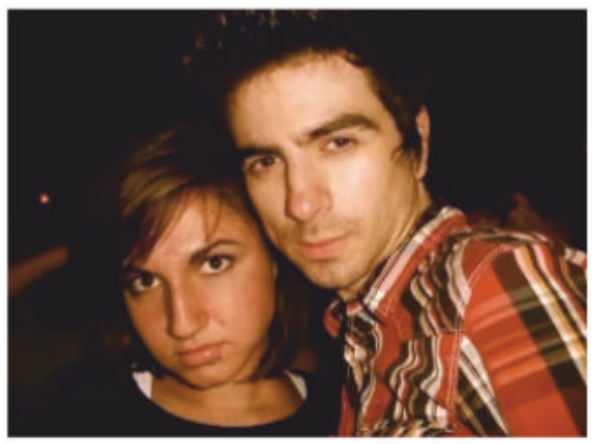
Geever encouraged Ella to follow the band to its next show, in Pittsburgh, she says. (ROLLING STONE reviewed a Facebook status Ella posted about driving up to Pittsburgh in the fall of 2013.) "I knew that we were going to have sex," Ella says. "But I was still very young; I was not very sexually experienced.... He kept asking me if I was a virgin, and then bound my wrists and gagged me." Ella claims she explicitly told Geever not to perform certain sex acts, but he ignored her.

"I was in pain by the end of it," she says. "As more time has gone on and I've been with other people and had more experiences, you realize, 'OK, hold on, that was a hard boundary for me that he ignored.' I refer to all of it as 'that guy who assaulted me.' " (A close friend of Ella's confirmed that Ella told her about the alleged assault a few weeks after it happened. ROLLING STONE also reviewed a tweet Ella posted last August alluding to Geever and the alleged assault.)

Elizabeth met Geever during the Warped Tour in 2007, when she was 18 and the band was coming off its biggest release yet with *For Blood and Empire*, following its signing with RCA. (ROLLING STONE is identifying Elizabeth by her middle name.) At a show two years later, Geever pulled her and another fan from the crowd onstage. The two made plans for Elizabeth, a hairdresser, to attend the next show to cut Geever's hair. As Elizabeth watched the subsequent gig from backstage, Geever gave her a shout-out. "I've been looking up to this band for so long," Elizabeth says. "When I turned 18, my first tattoo was an Anti-Flag tattoo.... [The shout-out] was a huge deal. It felt honestly indescribable." (ROLLING STONE reviewed photos of Elizabeth with Geever at the shows.)

After spending time on the tour bus with the rest of the band, Elizabeth says, Geever took her on a walk, where





Telling Their Story

Clockwise from top left: Geever with Jenn, who met him at 16 and describes him as a "wolf in sheep's clothing"; Tali Weller says she was 12 when she met Geever and was so blinded by trust in the charismatic teen that she didn't question him when he persuaded her to have anal sex; Suzanne says she began dating Geever at 17, with the singer even meeting her mother, allegedly claiming he was 19 when he was 30; superfan Kristina Sarhadi believed Geever was the "anti-rape" singer until a 2010 night when, she claims, he violently assaulted her.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF "JENN"; COURTESY OF TALI WELLER; COURTESY OF "SUZANNE"; COURTESY OF KRISTINA SARHADI

he pulled her into a secluded area outside a building, began kissing her, and stuck his hands down her pants. "I was feeling so torn because I was scared [and] I was very young," she says. But she was also elated. "I was like, 'Oh, my gosh, this is unreal. He likes me and he wants to date me.' "

For the next few months, Elizabeth remained in frequent contact with Geever as he was on tour in Europe. Sometimes Geever sent her sweet messages, she says. Other times, she claims, he would send unsolicited nude images and call her unprompted while masturbating. "It jumped all around," she says. "When he would call me, it was never to have a conversation. As soon as I picked up, he was panting and telling me what he was doing to himself."

"I was getting creeped out," she adds. "I wouldn't even say anything on the phone most of the time. I didn't even know what to say – I had never been in that kind of phone call with anybody ever in my life."

The two eventually fell out of touch until 2011, when Elizabeth was visiting Pittsburgh and reached out to Geever, who invited her to a recording studio, she says. Elizabeth says Geever almost immediately tried to put his hands down her pants, began forcibly kissing her, and made her perform oral sex on him. "He just seemed like he was mad, and a different person," she recalls. Afterward, Elizabeth says she quickly left. "I just wanted to get out of there," she says. "But at the same time, I was like, 'OK, maybe his desires are a little bit more rough.' I was unsure if that was him or if it was just his preferences."

The next day, the two were supposed to go for lunch, but Geever asked Elizabeth to meet him at a hotel, where Elizabeth says he assaulted her. "He first put a spreader bar on me, which I had never seen in my life at that point," she says. "At another point, he flipped me over with the spreader bar and hogtied me – which again, I had never even been restrained. It was very scary because it wasn't anything that he asked. None of that mattered."

In the middle of the alleged assault, Elizabeth says Geever took a personal phone call. "From the sounds of it, it was, like, a dental visit, and he just left me there like that," she says. "I'm facedown into the pillow sobbing and he left me like that."

Afterward, Elizabeth says Geever appeared cheery and wanted to get lunch, describing herself as feeling rattled by the emotional whiplash. Moments before, she was restrained and her cries of pain were ignored. Now, she was expected to calmly eat lunch in public across from the person who she says seemed unfazed by her obvious discomfort. "With mascara all over my face, I ran out of there," she says. (Two friends recall Elizabeth telling them about the encounter soon after they met, when she moved to her current city. One says she was told around 2018 during a conversation about the Warped Tour. The second says Elizabeth told her roughly two to four years ago, when Anti-Flag came up in a conversation about music.)

A third woman, Hannah Stark, filed a police report against Geever in August on accusations of sexual assault stemming from an early 2020 encounter in the United Kingdom. Her story, which ROLLING STONE has corroborated through reviewing photos of injuries, her messages with Geever, and conversations about the assault with friends, mirrors the violent experience of Sarhadi's.

Stark claims Geever suddenly handcuffed her, spanked her, and forced her to perform oral sex, as he used degrading language toward her. She says she tried to physically get away from Geever at one point, but could not. "I couldn't breathe, and then he eventually stopped," she says. "When I looked up at him, he just had this look of satisfaction on his face. It was horrible." At no point did Geever check that she was OK or ask for consent to the acts, Stark says, describing herself as "scared." Stark acknowledges she didn't explicitly say no to Geever, because she feared it "would make things worse." "To be honest, I thought he would like that," she says.

Police in the U.K. confirmed to ROLLING STONE they received a "report of a serious sexual assault" related to Stark's allegation. Although Stark says she provided police with a witness list and offered 300-plus items of documentation, she says the police recently informed her that they were declining to move forward because she never told Geever "no."

In the two years since the alleged assault, Stark says she scoured the internet with a sinking feeling. "Something in me was like, 'There's no way that I'm the only person he has done this to,' " she says. Finding nothing, Stark decided to anonymously post on the Tumblr page "The Industry Ain't Safe" one night in March 2022. "Justin Sane from Anti-Flag," she wrote. "Am I really the only person this has happened to?"

The Tumblr post became a beacon for other women, who had searched online for years for other allegations to no avail. "I kept my eyes open," Suzanne says, recalling how she stumbled upon the post last year. "My stomach dropped. I should have responded then and not have left her feeling like the only one.... [Not responding] would eat me alive."

It ended up also being the catalyst for Sarhadi to come forward. Seeing no responses, Sarhadi replied that something had happened with her too. "Once I saw [the post], it was just no question," Sarhadi explains. "If I hadn't seen that, I don't know. I could have gone back and forth on this for another 10 years."

SOON AFTER the podcast aired, 44-year-old Pittsburgh native Tali Weller says she received an unexpected message about the episode from a childhood friend, who wanted to check that she was doing OK.

It had been more than three decades since a 12-year-old Weller had met a 17-year-old Geever through their local church youth group in 1990. "I have this memory in his car of my first kiss with him," Weller says. "I was so blinded by trust for him and infatuation, he had me sold to follow his lead."

Their encounters, which Weller says Geever had instructed her to keep a secret, were split between friendly, chaste exchanges in public and sexual activity in closets, the lofted rehearsal space at his family home, and sleeping bags on overnight church trips. "I remember that I didn't feel comfortable having sex," she says. "His answer was anal sex."

Weller says their sexual encounters lasted for a year and a half, until she was 13. (ROLLING STONE has spoken to two family members who confirm Weller told them about the nature of her relationship with Geever within the past 10 years. ROLLING [*Cont. on 74*]

PROFILE

The World Still Belongs to Kylie Minogue

Thanks to a new album, a Vegas residency, and a global hit, the Australian star is enjoying another career renaissance

By BRITTANY SPANOS

IT'S A SUNNY afternoon in Los Angeles, but inside a nondescript bar in the Pendry West Hollywood hotel, a lavish champagne-topped celebration, fit for the late hours of the night, is well underway. For just one day, the space has become a stand-in for Voltaire nightclub, an intimate, *belle de nuit*-inspired venue located in Las Vegas' famed Venetian resort – and it's all for Australian pop queen Kylie Minogue.

Inside, Minogue is gliding through a room of influencers and journalists, flashing her signature smile. She's about to announce that she'll be Voltaire's inaugural star as she kicks off her first-ever residency this November, though the news feels like Vegas' worst-kept secret: Rumors of the pop veteran hitting the Strip have been floating around all summer. Still, Minogue is so excited, she's practically bubbling over like a glass of her namesake prosecco. Vegas had been on her mind for a while, but she wanted to make it happen at just the right moment. Now, with an almost four-decade career and a new chart-topping hit, there's no better time.

"I was thinking years ago, I want to do it when I'm younger, not when I'm at the sunset of my career," she explains during a roundtable before the party. Surrounded by ice buckets filled with Kylie-brand wines, she holds court with everyone trying to grab a few minutes of her attention; like true pop royalty, she's chatty and attentive, even recognizing a few familiar faces. ("I missed the caviar!" she trills at one point, having been too focused on schmoozing to grab a bite to eat.)

Minogue's Vegas residency has been nearly three years in the making. Talks began around the time she released 2020's *Disco,* an album that channeled the spirit of Seventies dancefloor divas. The LP arrived smack-dab in the middle of the pandemic, when no one could sweat out her songs at the club like she'd envisioned. However, Minogue found herself on the same wavelength as stars like Dua Lipa and Jessie Ware. The trio of disco revivalists formed a united front as they celebrated the genre, sometimes including one another in their livestreamed shows and even in a few collaborations. Minogue's own livestream, the 50-minute Infinite Disco, sold close to 30,000 tickets during its initial broadcast.

But no one could have predicted what would happen this spring, when Minogue dropped "Padam Padam," the first single from her 16th studio album, *Tension*. The song became the summer's first pop-zeitgeist moment and a global blockbuster, soaring up the charts across the world. It also arrived in time for Pride Month, serving as the unofficial anthem for parades and celebrations everywhere. Even Prince William and Vice President Kamala Harris caught the "Padam" spirit, signaling the kind of crossover song that most artists wait their entire lives to enjoy.

"Whenever a song is released, in an instant, it's no longer yours. It takes on its own life," Minogue says. "This one grew up real fast. And it's not slowing down."

For her, this is yet another milestone, taking the already-established pop legend to brand-new heights. And "Padam Padam" is just the beginning of a major Minoguaissance. One of pop's hardest and most consistent workers, Minogue got back in the studio in 2021 to start *Tension* – another euphoric dance project from the queen of consistently delivering euphoric dance projects.

"Whenever a song is released, it's no longer yours. It takes on its own life. This one grew up real fast. And it's not slowing down."

But, as many great pop icons have often had to endure, it has at times felt like the world is just catching on to Minogue's impact. She has created timeless pop singles and left an indelible influence on Lady Gaga and countless other dance-floor doyennes. Now 55, with all signs pointing to her profile continuing to grow bigger still, Minogue is welcoming the love. "I feel like a lot of good things are coming together at the same time," Minogue tells me. She's soaking up every second.

MINOGUE'S CAREER has been marked by challenges since the beginning. As a teen, she had her big break on the successful Australia soap opera *Neighbours,* a show so popular in the Eighties that at one point it was watched by a viewership larger than the country's population. But when she decided to pursue her musical dreams with her first few singles, her pop identity was deemed too safe and virginal until she dated INXS' Michael Hutchence. Later, her alternative experimentations were met with mixed reviews from fans and critics alike. "And now as a woman of middle age, there's been challenges

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF Katerina Jebb

KYLIE RENEWED: The Australian pop star, photographed here in France, found success yet again with her hit "Padam Padam."

in every part of my career," she says. "Pop is supposed to look easy. But as we know, it's a lot of work to [make it] look easy."

That work continued in 2021, when Minogue "crept back into the studio" with some longtime friends and collaborators, like songwriters Richard "Biff" Stannard, Duck Blackwell, and Jon Green, as well as her trusted A&R Jamie Nelson. Having to finish *Disco* during lockdown revolutionized how Minogue creates music now. She rarely steps into proper studios anymore. Instead, she travels with a Telefunken microphone setup so that she can record whenever the mood strikes. "I did so many years and years and years, especially in the early days, of just being really nervous," she says. Those nerves would lead to bouts of tonsillitis or other wrenches thrown into her plans.

"Padam Padam" was recorded in a London hotel room. As the rest of the LP took shape, Minogue moved back to Melbourne, Australia, after three decades of living in the U.K. She worked on much of *Tension* from Australia, or London when she was in town, but it became clear that she needed a week with her "dream team" in one place. Since Biff doesn't fly, they chose to stay local, in an Airbnb in Surrey, England.

"We were having breakfast, lunch, and dinner together and making music. It was just glorious," she says.

For a few writing sessions, the quartet were joined by rising songwriters Anya Jones and Camille Purcell (a.k.a. Kamille). It was the "female energy" Minogue needed to get out of her comfort zone. "She was a household name for me and my family," Purcell says. It didn't take long for her and Minogue to connect. Purcell's two credits were written the same day. "She's so down-to-earth," Purcell says. "You don't even think you're in the room with Kylie. You feel like you're in the room with a friend you've known for a long time."

DISARMING AS SHE may be, Minogue is one of pop's most guarded stars. She is not one to typically sit for hours and do tell-all interviews. When paparazzi catch her, it's outside of events or for the rare vacation snapshot. In conversation, she chooses her words carefully, tying every potentially intimate revelation back to her work in a neat and well-practiced way.

There are few who know her as intimately as her frequent collaborator Biff. Their friendship stretches back to 1999, though he recalls being "a young gay man" doing the dance routines to "Better the Devil You Know" and "Shocked" in clubs earlier than that. "We've got a lifetime of friendship and stories, and I don't know how many songs we've done together, if we add up the songs that didn't make it and that did," says Minogue.

In the comfort of those sessions, with someone who has known her personally and professionally for so long, Minogue negotiates how much she'll let her listeners in past the bubbly pop-pixie persona. She became fiercely protective of her personal life at a young age out of necessity; tabloids and paparazzi quickly leeched onto her while she starred on *Neighbours*, and even more so as she became a pop star.

"What I think is great for a lot of people now is that there's a discussion about mental health and the toll [fame] can take on people. I had that. I lived that," she says. What's her secret to keeping much of her life away from the public eye? "It takes common sense. It takes some work, and it takes some sacrifice," she says. "I can really go from doing a full kind of blitz of doing it all and then stop and recalibrate."

Those sacrifices haven't stopped Minogue from being honest in the studio. "I'm happiest when I feel like I've expressed some deep emotion or thoughts that I'm struggling with and it's like talking with a friend," she says.

While Minogue goes to great efforts to keep her world as private as possible, the snippets that she does reveal point to a life that is ridiculously normal. Lately, the larger-than-life diva is concerned with when she should finish watching the last five episodes of *Succession*. She considers herself a good binge-watcher, and as she's gotten older, she's come to appreciate trips where she can just relax and do nothing. "I used to be the adventuring type. I'd really kind of scoff and say, 'Why would you want to sit on a beach for a week?' And now I'm thinking, 'A week on a beach would be great.' "

Biff and Minogue share a lot of music with each other, like Sigur Rós and some "quite heavy" dark electronica. They've also had regular "Ryan Murphy evenings" where they would watch *Feud* dressed up as either Bette Davis or Joan Crawford.

Minogue herself doesn't account for many other hobbies. She's a bit of a workaholic who's taken few breaks. The longest one was when she was getting treatment for breast cancer two decades ago, but even then, she wasn't gone for much time. "Sometimes [a long break] crosses my mind," she admits, "but it's fairly fleeting." She's restlessly curious, always wanting to discover a new world.

"There's a song that hasn't been written yet," she explains. " 'Padam Padam' didn't exist a year ago. I guess the ultimate seduction or challenge is to create that three and a half minutes of transformative magic."

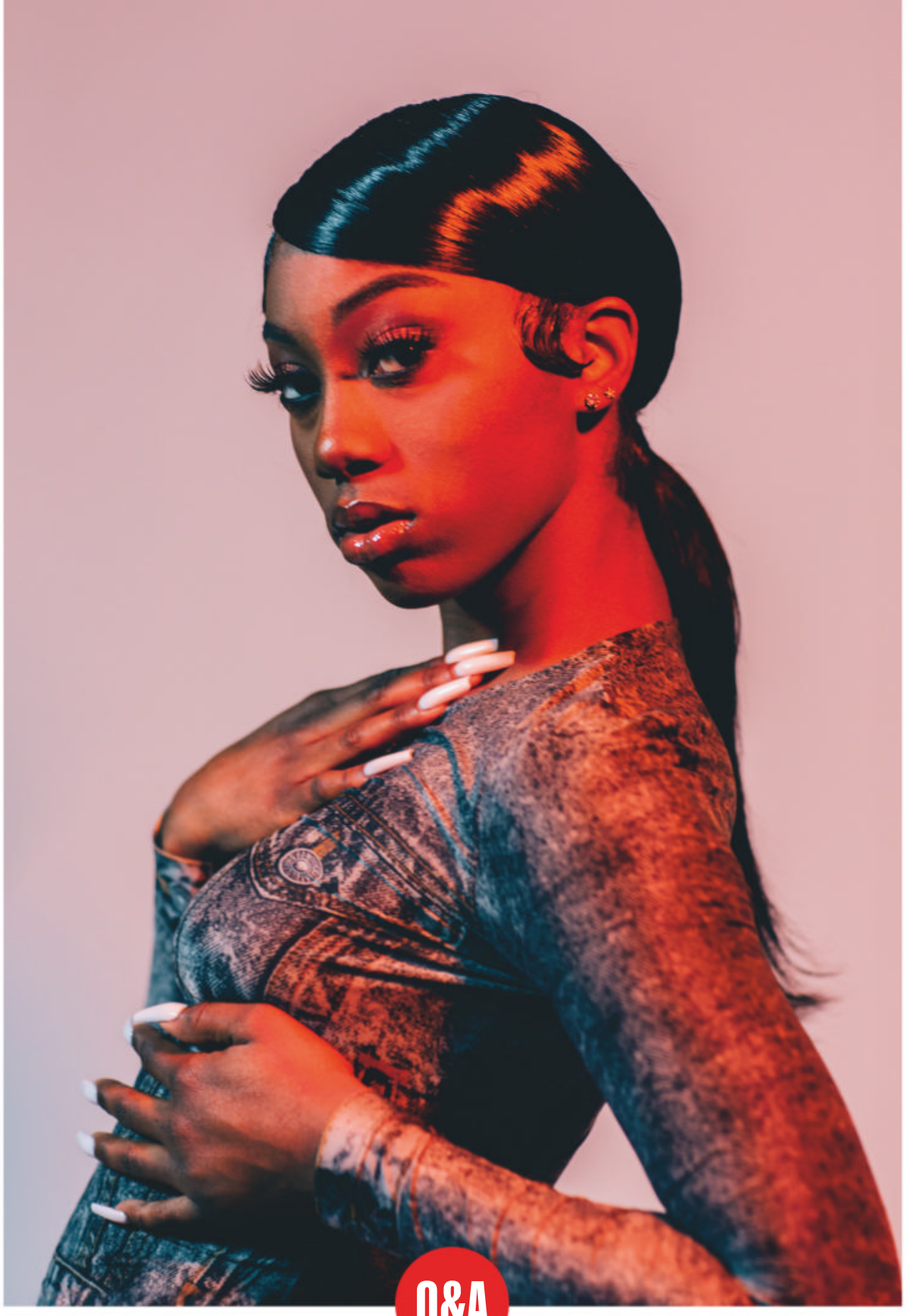
THESE DAYS, Minogue lives close to where she grew up. The significance of getting to reflect on her 35-year music career right where she "became a kind of pop addict" is not lost on her. "This would not have been my prediction, but it might have been one of my dreams," she says.

Looking back, Minogue has no big regrets. Sure, there are small things she would change, the natural nitpicking of a perfectionist. There are times she wishes she had stood up for herself more. But there's no question Minogue is in full control. "I now take ages doing everything, because I can," she says.

Her parents have already bought their tickets to Vegas for opening night; her mom toured with her years ago. "They would be hand-washing all the dancers' clothes in the bath of the hotel and rolling them up in towels and drying them overnight," she recalls. "I think of the sacrifices my parents have made and what they've seen me go through. They've seen what I've had to give for this life and career, as amazing and wondrous and incredible it is."

Seeing her parents in the audience may allow Minogue the tiniest moment to lift the veil for the world to see: "I think that's when I'll fall to pieces."

This piece ran as the September cover story of ROLLING STONE UK.



Q&A

Flo Milli

One of the most fun rappers alive on her four alter egos, love from Lil Wayne, and working it out at the rage room

By ANDRE GEE

FLO MILLI shows up at ROLLING STONE's New York office one August afternoon and holds court for an hour. After a spirited discussion about Raising Cane's chicken – Flo has a hack that involves mixing tenders with sauce in a cup – the 23-year-old Alabama rapper lets us in on her newest album, *Fine Ho, Stay*. Due this fall, it's the final LP of a trilogy, following 2020's *Ho, Why Is You Here?* and 2022's *You Still Here, Ho?* Flo (born Tamia Monique Carter) has consistently been one of the most fun listens in rap, rhyming with the candy-colored zeal of a *Clueless* character – albeit one who spits fire like "I cook like a chef and you bitches my dinner." *Fine Ho, Stay* is her most personal to date, and a more expansive version of her vibrant sound. Amazingly, much of it was recorded in one extremely productive night.

You seem to have overwhelming self-confidence. What do you attribute it to?
Being the underdog. Ever since I was younger, I've always been sure of myself. Even sometimes when I wasn't, I still came off like I was. I always been a lit bitch. Some people have that star quality, and people would try to make me feel like I shouldn't have been shining like that. But all that did was make me stronger.

You recorded a big part of *Fine Ho, Stay* in one night, right?
It was almost, like, what, 10 songs [that night]? It was me feeling it. I don't know how to explain it.

Was it 10 beats from a specific producer?
Yeah, it was one producer named Fyre.

You're going to be inhabiting four different alter egos in the videos and other creative for this album. How does that work?
I'm giving different versions of myself so that people know that I'm multifaceted. I have Florence Million, who's the pop star. She has aspects about her that's very girly and feminine, and I'm sure you've seen my Flo Milli flip. That's her hairstyle.

And then Dirty Floana is sexy, mysterious, savage. And Flo Ski is who I was for "Flo Milli," the Lil Wayne tribute. She has dreads, and she's the cool hipster girl – skateboarder, tomboy, but also unpredictable. And then last but not least, Flo Jo. That's my favorite one. What the fuck? Flo Jo is like the hood bitch. That's the one from Mobile [Alabama]. A bitch [throwing] a chair.

You released your breakthrough hit, "Beef (FloMix)," while you were still in college. What was that like?
I told my professor, literally as all the labels were reaching out to me, that I was switching classes. I was like, "My song is blowing up. I don't know what to do." He was like, "Make the right decision," and I never went back.

Tell me more about the "Flo Milli" freestyle. What made you want to rework Lil Wayne's "A Milli"?
I wanted to do it years ago, but I was scared. I was like, "Dang, this is a big song. And he's a GOAT." I wanted to wait till the right time. [It felt like] that time was now, plus it's the 50th year of hip-hop, so I wanted to pay tribute to him.

Has Wayne heard it?
He did post it on his [Instagram] story, and my manager talked to him. He said he loved it.

A lot of women in rap, historically, were the protégées of a male rapper. But now it seems like everybody's standing on their own. Why do you think that dynamic's shifted like that?
I feel like what goes around comes around. So if men feel like they could degrade women in music, then it's time we learn their ways and flip it back on them. It's about women becoming stronger and having a voice and being unapologetic about who they are. We're applying ourselves. Not to say that women before weren't, but I think it's more accepted now.

You see a lot of men supporting the Sexyy Reds, the GloRillas, the Lattos, the Ice Spices. We have to put a lot more work and money into it. We got to spend money on hair and makeup and all that. A guy could just throw on a chain, get a little haircut. A couple years ago, rappers would say crazy shit, and it would go viral. But for a girl, that would not work [in the past]. But I feel like now, girls can do that.

You tweeted, "I wish y'all would stop with this tired narrative y'all like to push about my career." What is that narrative and what made you talk about it?
Them saying I'm underrated, or the colorism thing. They want me to be insecure about my skin tone, which is never going to happen. I want people to understand everybody does not hate themselves. I think I'm a bad bitch, and there's nothing you could say that's going to make me think otherwise. So please stop.

You grew up doing theater and drama club. What do you remember about it?
My first plays were in church when we were doing the Easter program and the Christmas program, so it was more so stories in the Bible. When I got in the school drama club, the first play I did was *Peter Pan,* and I was a star, literally a star in the sky. I had a part, I said something, but I was in a big-ass star suit on the wall.

What do you do when you have a free day?
I like to read or go to the beach or go out to eat or get a massage. Oh, and I like to go to the rage room, too. I did it maybe four times last month. It's very therapeutic.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Diwang Valdez**

ADVERTISEMENT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BACARDÍ.

Groove L0-LA
Seed: 10231985

How the Potential of A.I. Will Help Us Liberate Music

Generate

AVG KRP-10
Execute: 0.023

X: 1.23
Y: 125.2
Z: 255
Patt. 0.24

Groove BER-CES
Seed: 20.0779

LIVE PASSIONATELY. DRINK RESPONSIBLY. ©2023 BACARDÍ, THEIR TRADE DRESSES AND THE BAT DEVICE ARE TRADEMARKS OF BACARDÍ & COMPANY LIMITED. EACH RUM 40% ALC. BY VOL.

The origins of The Concept A.I.bum

by Award-Winning Music Producer, Boi-1da

recognizer =
patt.recog(63)
MON-0306

Unless you've been living on another planet, you've probably been hearing a lot of talk about artificial intelligence. Is AI a passing trend or will it change the way we live? We're about to find out.

Unless you've been living on another planet, you've probably been hearing a lot of talk about artificial intelligence. Is AI a passing trend or will it change the way we live? We're about to find out.

Among musicians and producers, the debate over AI has been quite the hot topic. Some fear that AI-generated music could put artists and songwriters out of work, and lead to a decline of quality and innovation.

That being said, I feel that if we can get in front of AI technologies and use them responsibly, we can support the future of music while maintaining its integrity. I think that one of the best and most obvious ways we can accomplish that is by harnessing the power of AI to create new ways for established players to work with rising talents and share their skills.

Seed: 353011226

> ...a true artist will always find their voice, regardless of technology.

That's what my third and latest Music Liberates Music collaboration with BACARDÍ is all about. Our goal is always to uplift and expose up-and-coming new artists, and up-and-coming ideas to discover how the evolution of technology can catalyze positive change in our communities. In 2021 we focused on how NFTs could create an entirely new revenue model for artists. In 2022 we revolutionized how fans could discover music through a one-of-a-kind apparel collection. This time around, we're harnessing the power of generative AI to create a cool little record called The Concept A.I.bum. We're training a generative AI program on a selection of my beats, enabling it to create music in my style. From there, we'll work with five emerging artists hand-picked from around the globe who will each have the opportunity to test out multiple demos using those AI-generated beats. Finally, I'll enter the studio with them one-on-one to finalize a single incredible track. I hope The Concept A.I.bum will show that when used responsibly, AI can inspire new music, increase collaboration, and help rising artists take their careers to the next level by improving the quality of their demos while preserving that ever-important human touch.

Over the past year or so, I've become increasingly interested in the capabilities of AI: How it works, what can be done with it, and how I can use it to complement what I'm already doing as a producer. Music technology is always evolving, and just as synthesizers and DDJs (Digital Disc Jockey) have revolutionized music making in previous decades, AI is starting to change the game for today's generation. There's so much potential to use it for good that I'm excited to unlock and explore.

The AI tool that we're building with BACARDÍ for this year's Music Liberates Music campaign will take my music, my stems, and my catalog, and program it in a way that can compute hundreds of outputs I never even thought possible. It takes my brain and supercharges it, as it mixes tracks that I might not even have thought possible. It helps not only with efficiency, but scale as well, and since we're only using it to work on this EP with these five artists, our work is still meticulously managed and protected. This technology wouldn't function without me, and it's so much just an extension of my own self, so I find that this AI tool is a new, more efficient way of doing work. By working with AI, we have the power to unlock near-limitless creative possibilities and provide opportunities to collaborate in ways we could never previously imagine.

Musicians and artists can embrace AI responsibly by using it to improve productivity, and to make music of a better quality while maintaining its integrity. You're feeding your best into the AI [program], so it's just going to come out the best quality every time. Whereas, as a human being you might get up one day, and think, "I don't feel like doing this. I don't feel like doing that." So, AI can be a complementary tool, and not just on days where you're feeling off your A-game. As a producer, I often wish I could do more—be in more than one place at once, collaborate with more people, work on more tracks—but there are very human, physical limitations to doing so. Through the AI technology I'm building with BACARDÍ for this campaign, I can work with a wider group of artists at the same time, before still getting into the studio with them to put that final magic human touch on the track.

It's always important to protect the integrity of your music, but at the end of the day, nobody's going to be able to do what I can do—or what any artist can do—and that's what makes music so relatable to our fans and transcendent for generations. AI will never be able to replicate a person's unique human experiences and the deeply complicated, never linear, human rollercoaster of emotions.

You'll always feel the authenticity of a true artist, and a true artist will always find their voice, regardless of technology.

Technology is always evolving and AI is here to stay for the foreseeable future. I hope The Concept A.I.bum will show people that you can use AI for good, and—for creatives—that it's worth testing out in a controlled environment. AI is never going to replace the human touch, but it's here for humans to use to further their creativity. When it comes to music, I see it just getting bigger and bigger. I can also see it helping us figure out new sounds and new creative ways to put together music. You never know where AI can really go and how much further we can take it, but when used correctly, it's a step in a positive direction.

I hope that The Concept A.I.bum can inspire others to explore AI technologies on their own so that it can be used responsibly to uplift even more creative voices from here on out. This isn't simply about making the production process quicker, it's also about collaboration, connection, and providing emerging artists opportunities they've never had before. Even though we're using the AI tool to jumpstart the process for the BACARDÍ campaign, I'm still planning to spend ample time in the studio with each artist finalizing their tracks—and the results will benefit us all. Music is going through a changing phase right now. There has to be new sounds and new tones and things that people are just waiting to hear, and I think AI is going to help music get there.

The Concept A.I.bum **will be available on vinyl and streaming platforms in November. Follow @bacardi on Instagram for more updates. Like all BACARDÍ Music Liberates Music projects, all proceeds will benefit the artists. So, check it out, and open your mind to the future of technology and music.**

Seed: 96111225

> Musicians and artists can embrace AI responsibly by using it to improve productivity, and to make music of a better quality while maintaining its integrity.

◀ Photo: Aijani Payne

ALL EYES ON LIVA

She's living her best life on both coasts, and she's so over heartbreak. And thanks to her new album, *Guts*, the 20-year-old superstar has leveled up – with the whole world watching

By Angie Martoccio

PHOTOGRAPHY, PROP CONCEPT, AND COLLAGE CREATION BY
John Yuyi

STYLING BY
Jared Ellner

TAPES - COMPACT DISCS
Tel.
Tel.
1860
384 9847
POUNDS

"OH, MY GOD – LOOK!"

Olivia Rodrigo says. "I just parallel parked for you!"

We're sitting in Rodrigo's black Range Rover in L.A.'s Highland Park, stopped outside her producer Dan Nigro's home studio. Rodrigo has a killer late-July outfit on – short, summery floral dress; tall, brown leather boots; her fingers decked out in rings – but she's pretty bummed about the new pimple between her eyebrows. Accutane, the acne med she's been on for about six months, makes her lips perpetually dry, so there's some Burt's Bees and two travel tubes of Aquaphor jostling around in the cup holder. It's all pretty typical for a 20-year-old driver, except for the fact that the calendar on her car's display screen reads "Rolling Stone interview."

The parallel-parking thing – funny story. Two years ago, on her angst-ridden anthem "Brutal," Rodrigo blurted out "I'm not cool, and I'm not smart/ And I can't even parallel park" to the tune of more than half a billion streams. "Brutal" was the opening track on 2021's *Sour,* the most feverishly anticipated pop debut in years. The album instantly broke the record for the most-streamed female debut in a single week on Spotify, completing Rodrigo's transformation from Disney teen to one of the biggest, most relatable pop stars on the planet in less than six months. She won three Grammys, performed on *SNL,* and sang two songs with Billy Joel at Madison Square Garden. ("He's uncle vibes," she says.) She even visited the president at the White House in an effort to urge young people to get the Covid-19 vaccine. She's conquered the parking thing, too, apparently. Now, she just has some other stuff to figure out.

Her top priority right now: overcoming the insane amount of pressure to match *Sour* – and maybe even top it. Enter *Guts.* "The beginning was really hard," she says. "I felt like I couldn't write a song without thinking about what other people were going to think of it. There were definitely days where I found myself sitting at the piano, excited to write a song, and then cried."

"There's so much chaos in your head during second-album time," says Katy Perry, who faced similar expectations while working on 2010's *Teenage Dream.* "You have your whole life to make your first record, and then maybe two years to make your second – while going through a real psychological change as well. Like, 'Oh, my God, I can buy my mom a car,' and, 'Oh, my God, I don't have to have the stress from my past.' But it's a mental jungle out there."

Perry offered to serve as a mentor to Rodrigo. "The first time I met her," Perry says, "I put my hands on her shoulders and was like, 'Listen, I'm here. Whatever you need.' Because I know exactly what these pop girlies are going through, and when I was growing up, no one really did that for me."

Nigro, a fortysomething former alt-rocker and Rodrigo's closest collaborator, also helped ease her anxiety. "Dan was like, 'You've got to go home and rest,' " she recalls. The duo would battle what they jokingly called "the dread" with food breaks, usually burgers or Taiwanese – sometimes Taco Bell if they were feeling lazy. "I've really eaten good making the record," she jokes. She'd often visit Nigro's one-year-old daughter, tasting her baby food ("I'm like, 'Shit, this is delicious!' ") and gifting her with adorable outfits. "She's the ultimate cure for writer's block," Rodrigo says.

Guts is a collection of pop-punk ragers and aching, pensive burners that suggest that after all that multiplatinum heartbreak, Rodrigo is finally having a blast – a wild and free 20-year-old who holds nothing back. "I've got sun in my motherfucking pocket, best believe," she sings on the euphoric "All-American Bitch." At other moments, like on "Get Him Back!," she's scorchingly funny: "He had an ego and a temper and a wandering eye/ He said he's six-foot-two and I'm like, 'Dude, nice try!' "

"Our goal was to make something a little more playful, a record that didn't take itself so seriously," says Rodrigo, who knows that most fans viewed *Sour* as a direct response to her split with her *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* co-star Joshua Bassett. "The last album was definitely a breakup record, much to my chagrin," she says. "I was really trying to make it not that, but that's what it was. I'm feeling a lot happier these days. Everything's pretty good. So I wasn't going to make something super devastating, a record of ballads."

The artist who captured America's attention by singing "I'm so sick of 17/Where's my fucking teenage dream?" is now a fully-fledged adult. She recently became a New Yorker, buying an apartment in Greenwich Village (she may or may not have gotten bedbugs). "Living alone is very frightening," she notes. "I always get scared someone's going to come in and murder me, or a ghost is going to come and haunt me." But she's still bicoastal, renting a house in Beverly Hills, and hoping to buy a couple of neighborhoods over, in Los Feliz. "I go half and half," she says of both coasts. "Do I feel like I could ever live full time in New York? I just love car culture. I listen to new music solely in the car. Nothing beats it."

In February, she'll turn 21. "The thought of being able to sit down in a bar and talk to people you've never met sounds like the best time," she says. *Guts* is all about those moments of newfound freedom.

Associate managing editor ANGIE MARTOCCIO *wrote the boygenius cover story for the February issue.*

After *Sour*, fans hoped Rodrigo would release an album called *Sweet*.

"I suppose maybe if I was madly in love I would've written a *Sweet* album," she says. "What's my next one going to be? *Umami*?"

PREVIOUS SPREAD: DRESS: **MARINE SERRE**. SHOES: **FEMME LA**. THIS SPREAD: TOP: **MARKGONG**. SHORTS: **VEX LATEX**.

TOP: **GUCCI BY TOM FORD**, COURTESY OF **LOVERS LANE LONDON**. SKIRT: **DSQUARED2**. SHOES: **WESTERN AFFAIR**. JEWELRY: **TIFFANY & CO.** BODYSUIT: **S/S 1998 GIANNI VERSACE**. TIGHTS: **WOLFORD**. SHOES: **3JUIN**.

"All of my role models are unapologetically who they are. I can't cherry-pick parts of myself to express."

"This album encapsulates growing up and figuring yourself out in the world, and the awkwardness of that," she says. "I feel myself growing leaps and bounds."

We continue our drive, with Rodrigo admitting she's prone to getting parking tickets. One time, she even hit Nigro's neighbor's car (the owner was nice about it). "It was just a little scratch," she says. "But I was crying so bad. You know that feeling when your car hits something? It's like your stomach just sinks out of your ass."

We wind around succulent-strewn streets and avenues that begin to blur together. "Did I go the right way?" she asks, mainly to herself. "We might go for a joyride."

NIGRO'S HOME STUDIO sits inside a charcoal-painted house enclosed in hedges, with gravel and ferns guarding the persimmon door. Nigro now lives in Pasadena, but he still records here; it's where they cut *Sour* and a portion of *Guts* (they recorded the rest at Electric Lady in New York). Rodrigo gives me a tour, quickly opening and closing a door that reveals a high chair surrounded by clutter before leading me down the hall. One room contains a drum set and a Yamaha upright piano with a super-Seventies burnt-orange bench. There's a whiteboard containing Rodrigo's recording schedule in green marker, with red hearts next to the singles "Vampire" and "Bad Idea Right?"

An additional room serves as the main studio, with a red Persian rug and macramé window cover providing the coziest of vibes. A framed photo of Neil Young's 1970 classic, *After the Gold Rush,* hangs in the center of the room, not far from a poster advertising Nigro's old band, As Tall as Lions, performing at the Troubadour back in 2010. Mini Polaroids are lined up along the wall, featuring visitors ranging from indie singer-songwriter Zella Day to Carole King.

In the corner of the living room, between a fireplace and the sliding glass door to the patio, sits a turntable with stacks of records leaning against it. She flips through them, pausing on *Sour* – she inscribed her producer's personal copy with the words "To Dan, suck it!" – and then stopping on Caroline Polachek's *Desire, I Want to Turn Into You,* which includes a track produced by Nigro. "She's such a fucking good live singer," Rodrigo says, mentioning she saw Polachek at the Greek Theater in 2021.

Rodrigo has thought a lot about *Desire,* the follow-up to Polachek's solo breakthrough, 2019's *Pang*; it's a model for avoiding the sophomore slump. "It's not a complete reinvention of the first album, but it's new and fresh," Rodrigo says. "We didn't set out to reinvent the wheel."

She has some other second albums she loves: Coldplay's *A Rush of Blood to the Head,* Perry's *Teenage Dream*. "She had five Number One hits off of that one album," she says, calling Perry's *Part of Me* one of her favorite music docs. "That album is so iconic and so good."

There's a song on *Guts* titled "Teenage Dream," but Rodrigo claims it's a coincidence. "We thought about changing the name," she admits. "If someone looks up 'Teenage Dream' on Spotify, there's no way in heck that my song's going to pull up first."

Either way, her mentor doesn't mind. "It's nice to see it resonating through the years to different age groups," Perry says of the similar titles. "She's a craftswoman. It's like when *Fleabag* really made a huge impression on people. She's writing about all of our inner thoughts, outward things that we would never say."

"Teenage Dream," the final track on *Guts,* is incredibly different from Perry's 2010 pop anthem – it begins as a piano dirge but evolves into a cathartic hurricane of rock, as Rodrigo envisions the day she is no longer pop's brightest, youngest star. Perry sang about never looking back. Rodrigo would prefer not to.

"It's about a fear of not being a teenager anymore and not having this image of being some type of ingénue or prodigy kid," she explains. "I grew up in this weird environment where everyone praised me for being talented for my age, and it's about me facing this pressure of making a sophomore record while also facing this pressure of wondering if people would still think that I was cool even when I wasn't a 17-year-old girl writing songs anymore."

Rodrigo is now sitting on a forest-green velvet couch, her boots off to the side, revealing white tube socks with the Parental Advisory label printed on them. Next to us is the studio kitchen, where three bottles of wine sit on the counter. Rodrigo says there were a lot of empty bottles after her album wrap party. "We looked like we were alcoholics," she jokes.

She sings about partying on *Guts* in a way she hasn't before: On "Bad Idea Right?" she declares, "Haven't heard from you in a couple of months/But I'm out right now and I'm all fucked up"; on "Making the Bed," she admits, "Sometimes I feel like I don't wanna be where I am/Getting drunk at a club with my fair-weather friends."

It's entirely normal subject matter for someone Rodrigo's age to sing about, but she was hesitant about including some of those lines on the album. "I was actually so scared to put that out," she says. "I have a lot of young girl fans, and I'm very conscious of that. But also, it's real. All of my role models are

"I find myself caring less and less," she says about fans trying to decode her songs.

"I just write songs; it's not my job to interpret them for other people."

DRESS: **DILARA FINDIKOGLU**.
SHOES: **FEMME LA**.
JEWELRY: **CARTIER**.

my role models because they're unapologetically who they are. I can't cherry-pick parts of myself to express. And if that's the worst thing that I'm doing, then I think I'm doing pretty well."

Some of her core influences are ferociously honest punk and alt-rock records from before she was born. When she was about 14, Rodrigo remembers sleeping with a turntable next to her bed. To wake her up each morning, her mom would drop the needle on Babes in Toyland's *Fontanelle* (another excellent second album). Listening to Kat Bjelland's screams, she'd get dressed and ready for the day. "Rock in that feminine way, that's just the coolest thing in the world to me," she says.

Working on *Guts,* she tried to tap into Babes in Toyland's raw power, particularly on "All-American Bitch," whose title Rodrigo found in Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. Kicking off the album, the song takes aim squarely at anyone who might have heard *Sour* and dismissed her as a one-dimensional heartbroken teen: "I forgive, and I forget/I know my age, and I act it."

"I think everyone can relate to being put in a box in some sense," she explains. "Something I always grappled with, especially when I was younger, is feeling like I couldn't be angry or express dissatisfaction or complain for fear of being ungrateful. It was drilled into me, and it caused a lot of problems. I had all this anger bubbling up inside me – especially when you're a teenager and you're confused and you feel like the world is out to get you and you're so insecure – and I'd have dreams where I was going crazy. I felt like I could never be like that in real life."

"All-American Bitch" contains delicate verses and one hell of a raucous chorus, a move that Rodrigo credits to another big, loud Nineties band. "I have been listening to so much Rage Against the Machine this year," she says. "That's my favorite band right now. I would just play it over and over again on my way to and from the studio. I want to go to the Rock Hall of Fame so bad because they're getting inducted." She's going to miss the ceremony this fall in Brooklyn, though, due to "some immovable schedule conflict" – a problem that's positively driving her nuts right now: "I am literally going to cry myself to sleep about it," she says.

She's well aware that some of her most devoted fans – a.k.a. Livies – were hoping that after *Sour,* she'd release an album titled *Sweet*. "I mean, I suppose maybe if I was madly in love I would've written a *Sweet* album," she says. "I don't know. What's my next one going to be? *Umami* or something?"

Madly in love or not, it's easy to wonder how she might feel about the Olivia who made *Sour* – the one whose career absolutely exploded after releasing "Drivers License" back in January 2021. "I connect to who I used to be, and it makes me sad," she says. "I'm like, 'What are you crying about, girl?' I'm also like, 'Ha-ha, you don't even know, it gets so much better.'"

I wonder if Rodrigo she sees herself becoming the type of artist who won't mind playing her breakout hit for decades to come. "I was thinking about that the other day," she says. "I saw Stevie Nicks singing 'Landslide' to this huge stadium of people. Not that 'Drivers License' is 'Landslide,' by any means. But I was like, 'Damn.' That heartbreak that you feel when you're young, thinking about singing that song when I'm Stevie Nicks' age ... it's really powerful."

RODRIGO LOVES a trip to the psychic. Not, she makes clear, the shitty ones on Hollywood Boulevard, where they tell you that in order to cleanse your dark energy, you need to cough up $5,000. "They aren't supposed to do that," she says. "The good ones that I've been to have been only really positive. I've even been to one that I saw multiple times. I saw her a year apart, and she was like, 'Yeah, that didn't go right. And I knew it back then, but I didn't want to tell you because you were supposed to go through it.' I was like, 'Huh. OK. Maybe!' "

Several psychics have told Rodrigo she's going to have twins. "I've always been so obsessed with the idea of motherhood," she says, before turning the tables on me: "Do you think you're going to have kids? I'm sorry! That's such a deep question. We just met."

We're sitting outside a taco joint on Figueroa Street, and Rodrigo is dipping chips into guacamole and sipping an iced tea. Children and marriage are two of her favorite topics. She even sings about them on the wistful "Love Is Embarrassing": "I'm planning out my wedding/With some guy I'm never marrying." "Since I was a kid, I'd pick out a baby name that would go good with their last name," she says. "That's how psychotic I am."

During several moments of our time together, Rodrigo reverses the interview and asks me questions about my upcoming wedding. "One more and I'll stop peppering you!" she says. She's eager to discuss wedding songs; she's been pondering her own for years. Her current options: Neil Young's "Harvest Moon," Modern English's "I Melt With You," and Bright Eyes' "First Day of My Life." "Literally planning my wedding with you over tacos!" she says.

Rodrigo tears up when I tell her I'm planning on a Bob Dylan song. "His discography is so humongous, I feel like I haven't even scratched the surface," she says, though she did name the socially anxious "Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl" after "Ballad of a Thin Man." Lately, she's gotten really into *Planet Waves* and *Blood on the Tracks*; the latter is her go-to airplane album. "I've wanted to write a song [like] 'If You See Her, Say Hello' for so long. Legend. He's so good."

When our server asks for a photo, Rodrigo politely says she'd prefer to take one when she's done eating. This is new for her; on a recent trip to Hawaii with her best friend, Madison Hu (her former co-star on the Disney series *Bizaardvark*), she declined to take any photos at all. "I never want to hurt anyone's feelings," she says, "but it was so nice. By not taking a picture, you actually talk to people and get to know them way better. It's not some transactional vibe."

Like many children of the internet, Rodrigo has profoundly mixed feelings about social media: She doesn't know life outside of the apps, yet finds them incredibly burdensome. Especially Instagram, an app that launched when she was seven, on which she now has more than 33 million followers. "I was reading a book that said – I'm going to butcher the number – but our brains are only wired to know 200 people in a clan setting," she says. "We're not supposed to know what some pretty girl in Australia is doing at the beach today. Our brains aren't hard-wired for that information. So I try to take it all with a grain of salt. It does make me feel depressed sometimes."

Like most pop stars, Rodrigo has a team to help her post on social media (she tries to keep it authentic, because "you can always tell when someone else is doing it"), but that wasn't the case when she released "Drivers License" in 2021. "I was so overwhelmed by all of the social media shit," she says. "I truly deleted my social media for six months. Because it was zero to a hundred, baptism by fire. I deleted all of it for a long time, and I'm so happy that I did that at that moment. I have a better handle on it now, but then I was just so cold turkey with it. I'm trying to figure out a happy medium."

When Rodrigo says "baptism by fire," she's referring to the intense public scrutiny that followed "Drivers License" becoming a hit. Listeners of all ages related to the track – just watch that *SNL* sketch – but they were also obsessed with untangling the drama. By the time *Sour* came out, millions of adults were deeply invested in a teenage love triangle that allegedly occurred between Rodrigo, Bassett, and fellow Disney actor Sabrina Carpenter.

None of the three have publicly addressed what exactly happened between them, and Rodrigo isn't about to start. Whether or not Bassett is the guy who listened to "Uptown Girl" with one or more of his costars, I'm curious to know how Rodrigo feels about the backlash he faced from strangers on the internet who assumed he left Rodrigo for Carpenter. I bring up an interview he gave last year, where he talked about having a major health crisis as a result.

"I mean, that's a tricky one," she says. "I actually, genuinely did not read the article you're talking about. But, yeah, all that stuff was really crazy. It's all been handled privately." She corrects herself: "*Handled* isn't the right word, but it's just not something I like talking about publicly. I take all that stuff seriously, but it happens in privacy. I'm not going to put out a statement. That's phony. We're all just people at the end of the day. I deal with it on a person-to-person level that people on Twitter don't see."

All the same, the public isn't going to stop trying to figure out her private life anytime soon. In late June, Rodrigo returned with the supernatural epic "Vampire." Immediately, fans resumed their sleuthing. This time, though, they suspected the track was about either producer Adam Faze or DJ and influencer Zack Bia, both of whom she was reportedly linked to, and both of whom are older than her – thus the line "Girls your age know better." Bia could easily be the "cool guy" who only comes out "at night" (he told *GQ* he's stayed home just "five or six times" in the past four years). The discourse can be exhausting. Is the song worth another round of public scrutiny?

"I find myself caring less and less," she says, with Arcade Fire's "Wake Up" blasting on the taco joint's speakers. "Behind the scenes, I do all of the things I am supposed to do and try to be as prepared as I can. People are going to say what they want to say. I feel like the more you try to control it, the more miserable you are, and the bigger it gets. I just write songs; it's not my job to interpret them for other people."

But on a Zoom call with Rodrigo, one month and several interviews with other publications later, she takes a slightly different stance. "I have a really big mouth, and that's something that I've had to learn how to control in this profession," she says. "But that's par for the course. I write diaristic songs, so of course everyone's going to have their own interpretation of it."

TOP: **EL/IF.** SKIRT AND SHOES: **1XBLUE**. NECKLACE AND WATCHES: **THE STEAMPUNK GHOST**. ANKLET: **PEARLLHEARTS**.

At one point Rodrigo mentions "You're So Vain," the Carly Simon song whose target has been a matter of public speculation for more than 50 years. When I finally ask Rodrigo if she was singing about Bia, she takes a moment, exhales, and smiles.

"No comment," she says.

WE MEET THE following evening at Little Dom's, a vintage Italian spot that would look more at home in Brooklyn's Carroll Gardens than the more hip Los Feliz. Rodrigo is wearing a red-plaid babydoll dress she got from Depop, with black loafers and white socks. "We had a good little chat yesterday," she says. "I feel like we established a lot."

Unlike yesterday, Rodrigo didn't snooze her alarm this morning, and made it to Pilates in Beverly Hills, joined by her friend, actress Bailee Madison. "That's my workout of choice," she says. "You can't fuck it up that badly. I love going to the Pilates places where it's older women. Nothing worse than a scene-y Pilates place where [you] run into people you know. I get so insecure about it."

As we sit down at the circular booth, she orders a Diet Coke and asks to sit on my left side (she was born half-deaf in her left ear). When I joke that she's like Jimmy Stewart's character in *It's a Wonderful Life,* she admits she hasn't seen it. "I don't know why I cannot see any movie that was made before 1970," she says. "My brain just doesn't compute. I've always wondered how the old Hollywood accent came to be, like Audrey Hepburn and Cary Grant. 'Darling!' It's not the way that anybody talks in real life."

At least in terms of films from the past 53 years, Rodrigo is a total movie buff – she even has a Letterboxd account. She saw two movies last Saturday: *Oppenheimer* with her dad, followed by 1983's *Valley Girl,* starring Nicolas Cage. "It's his first movie, and he's oddly so hot," she says. When I recommend that she see *Moonstruck,* in which Cage plays an angry, handsome baker with a wooden hand, she makes a note in her phone. "Sounds like a guy I'd fall for," she says.

Rodrigo was deeply affected by Greta Gerwig's *Barbie,* which she brings up several times throughout our days together. "I roll my eyes when people talk about shit like this, but here I am, being that person," she says. "It's such a beautiful, wonderful feminist movie. I'm so happy to be a girl. I don't know the last time that I saw a movie where it was so female-centered in a way that wasn't sexualized, or about some tormented woman going through some shit. It's just a beautiful, positive movie about this cool girl."

When I ask her how she feels about Dua Lipa, who made a cameo in the film, she lights up. "I'm so excited for her next album, I actually can't wait," she says, then brings up Lipa's electrifying performance at the 2021 Grammys, which included two *Future Nostalgia* tracks and speedy outfit changes. "It's so fucking good. I remember watching it on the TV and melting on the floor. Killed it. So tight and clean. They must have worked their asses off making that. I literally couldn't do it."

Rodrigo would rather be seen as a singer-songwriter than a pop star. When we discuss her idols, she mentions the impact Lorde had on her as a child. "I remember hearing 'Royals' on the radio," she says. "I was like, 'Wow, you can make a song about anything that you're feeling.' It doesn't have to be this breakup song. She wrote an album about what it was like to be 15 in the suburbs and feeling lost" – a theme that resonated with Rodrigo, who was 10 years old living in the quiet town of Temecula, California, at the time.

But there's another idol I want to ask about, a glittery elephant in the room: What, if anything, happened between her and Taylor Swift? Early in her music career, Rodrigo was quick to call Swift an inspiration. "I'm just so in awe of her constantly, and I truly would not be the songwriter I am today if I had not grown up being so inspired by everything she does," she told Ryan Seacrest in March 2021. They exchanged handwritten letters, and Swift gave her a ring similar to one she wore while making *Red*. Two months later, they met in person at the BRIT Awards.

Things got a little more complicated that summer, when Rodrigo gave Swift and Jack Antonoff two writing credits on *Sour*: first on "1 Step Forward, 3 Steps Back" (which interpolated Swift's "New Years Day") and then "Deja Vu" (which was inspired by Tay's "Cruel Summer"; Rodrigo also gave a credit to St. Vincent, a co-writer on Swift's song). Even if it was unclear whether Swift demanded the credits, more obsessive fans were convinced this led to a falling out. They began to see the alleged evidence everywhere: Rodrigo bonding over encountering "mean girls" with Alanis Morissette in this magazine; the 2023 Grammys, where Rodrigo and Swift seemingly had zero interactions; Swift selecting Carpenter, Rodrigo's supposed archnemesis, to open for her Eras Tour in Latin America. Some self-appointed sleuths even wondered whether Rodrigo masked "Vampire" as a love song, when in reality it was about Swift.

When I ask Rodrigo about the alleged feud, she's sipping on a bowl of Italian wedding soup. She goes quiet. "I don't have beef with anyone," she says calmly. "I'm very chill. I keep to myself. I have my four friends and my mom, and that's really the only people I talk to, ever. There's nothing to say." She adds: "There's so many Twitter conspiracy theories. I only look at alien-conspiracy theories."

She maintains this stance when I ask about the *Sour* co-writes, which, by August 2021, also included Paramore on "Good 4 U." "I was a little caught off guard," she says. "At the time it was very confusing, and I was green and bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Is that the phrase?" It's unclear if Rodrigo was forced to

PRODUCED BY RHIANNA RULE. PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTION BY EMMA REEVES. HAIR BY CLAYTON HAWKINS FOR A-FRAME. MAKEUP BY YUKARI BUSH. NAILS BY YOKO SAKAKURA FOR A-FRAME. TAILORING BY CARLOS ORDONEZ. SET DESIGN BY BRITTANY PORTER FOR ARTISTRY AGENCY. PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANCE BY EVADNE GONZALEZ, ALEX KENNEDY. DIGITAL TECHNICIAN: JULIAN LOPEZ. STYLING ASSISTANCE BY JESS MCATEE, BROOKE FIGLER, MAYA SAUDER. SET DESIGN ASSISTANCE BY T. MARSH. PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE BY DOUG STUCKEY AND MIKEY DE VERA.

give the credits: "It's not something that I was super involved in," she admits. "It was more team-on-team. So, I wouldn't be the best person to ask."

I'm curious to know what a more experienced Olivia would do. Would she demand credit from a young artist, or shrug it off, like Elvis Costello did when people noted the similarities between "Brutal" and "Pump It Up"? "I don't think I would ever personally do that," she says. "But who's to say where I'll be in 20, 30 years. All that I can do is write my songs and focus on what I can control."

We split spaghetti and meatballs and chicken parmesan, and Rodrigo orders a second Diet Coke before the bill arrives. "Thank you, Daddy Rolling Stone!" she says giddily.

AFTER DINNER, we walk around Los Feliz with Rodrigo's muscular, tattooed bodyguard a safe distance behind. Having employees tail her isn't exactly her favorite thing. "I love walking around and being alone," she says. "People get mad at me for doing it all the time. My managers are like, 'You can't do that, you have to have someone with you all the time.' But I feel safe. Am I safe? No idea. But that's just not something I'm willing to sacrifice."

Rodrigo points to a nearby brunch spot. "I went on a bad date here once," says. This gets her thinking: "I wonder if I'm someone's worst date. That's my goal: to wreak so much havoc. Yeah, that's what I want to do with my life." We get some ice cream at Jeni's – Rodrigo chooses honey vanilla bean on a cone – and turn down Franklin Avenue, quoting *Bridesmaids*. Rodrigo just saw it for a second time, and we exchange lines from the airplane scene back and forth:

"I have this [drink] all the time, and I'm much smaller than you."

"There's much more of a sense of community in coach."

"There's a colonial woman on the wing!"

For a minute, we attempt to find the Los Feliz murder mansion, from the popular true-crime podcast of that name, but it's nearly three miles away. Instead, we discuss the Long Island serial killer and the body in a barrel that recently washed up on the Malibu shore, and trade ghost stories our moms told us: Mine woke up in the middle of the night in a Savannah, Georgia, hotel room to find a bride sitting on her bed, while Rodrigo's once saw a strange man heading down to the basement of the Wisconsin house she grew up in. "Didn't tell a soul for 10 years," Rodrigo says of her mom's experience. "And then my grandma was like, 'I'm glad we had that house. We got it for so cheap because a guy died in the basement.'"

"Sorry, I'm so morbid lately!" she adds.

She thinks this penchant for darkness probably stems from a love of *Harry Potter*; like me, Rodrigo was shattered when a Hogwarts acceptance letter didn't arrive on her 12th birthday. Her love of witchcraft runs deep: In elementary school, she and her friends would "play *Harry Potter*" after class, filling cauldrons with leaves and water.

> "I don't have beef with anyone. I'm very chill. I keep to myself. There's so many Twitter conspiracy theories. I only look at alien-conspiracy theories."

Her mother, Jennifer, taught at that school, while her father, Chris, is a therapist. (She says her dad has yet to hear the line about him in "Get Him Back": "I am my father's daughter/So maybe I could fix him!") Rodrigo started home-schooling at 13, when she moved to L.A. to star in *Bizaardvark*. "Sometimes I feel I have poor social skills because of that upbringing," she says. "I always felt like I was missing out because I'm an only child and I'm home-schooled."

The only time Rodrigo was ever starstruck came around that age, when she met Vanessa Hudgens at a movie theater in L.A. "I freaked out," she says. "She's Filipino like me, and I remember thinking that was cool." Even cooler, Rodrigo was later cast as the kid who steps into Hudgens' role in the show-within-a-show on *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*. She continued filming on the Disney show even after *Sour*; the upcoming third season, which she only recently finished shooting, will be her last.

She recalls being on the *High School Musical* set the moment "Drivers License" debuted at Number One. She called Nigro from the studio bathroom. "I vividly remember being like, 'Number One, how cool is that?'" she says. "He was like, 'Olivia, you don't get it. Your life is different now.'"

She gets it now. But she's still processing it all – even our conversation from the previous day, when I asked her if, like Stevie Nicks, she sees herself performing her hit at 75. "You really elicited a big crisis in my mind," she says, chuckling. "But I'll get back to you. Let's schedule it in."

Visions of Robbie

WHEN THE BAND ended their original run with a farewell concert in San Francisco in 1976, Martin Scorsese was there to capture it for his brilliant documentary "The Last Waltz." The project marked the end of Robbie Robertson's tenure in the group, but the beginning of a collaboration with Scorsese that endured till Robertson's death this summer. In the remembrance below, Scorsese explores scenes from his and Robertson's time together – from traveling across Europe to watching Luis Buñuel films like "Un Chien Andalou" and "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" to listening to composer Michael Praetorius and Van Morrison. Together with the Polaroids Scorsese provided (above and next spread), it's a remarkable portrait of a remarkable friendship.

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

I was mad.

All wired. Erratically, but still – I was mad.

I wanted him to hear the Michael Praetorius. Brass and chorale, and I got even madder.

I knew they were talking about me. All of them. I knew it, I could see it in their eyes.

Their smirks. I could tell they were talking about me.

Back and forth in the room, the chorale, then the brass, chorale and brass, chorale and brass, driving the rant.

Corner of my eye, a waft of smoke.

Is that a wry smile or a smirk, too? Sitting on the couch. Taking in the show. This sphinx. This sphinx-like creature. His presence – cool. He was always cool.

He offers a word or two, quiet-like.

The paranoid twist I'm in keeps spinning. Chorale and brass. The sphinx takes it in – cool. Rides out the storm. Helps make it pass. Cools me down.

At least, he listened. He did listen. He was a great listener.

That must have been in the winter of 1978, I think – doesn't matter. We had been living in my house together about a year and a half. That would come to an end in the fall of that year.

All absurd. But it happened.

**

At times it was like a road movie – not *Easy Rider* or *Kings of the Road,* but the roads to Zanzibar, Singapore, Morocco. Why did I always feel like Bob Hope to his Bing Crosby?

EUROPE 1977

I woke up one night at the Hotel Meurice, and I didn't know where to place the camera.

Not cool.

Me lugging an award for *Taxi Driver* around, a pretty little statue of Donatello's David. Watching it go through X-ray machines at airports – I like to look at the silhouette in the machine.

From film festivals to parties to meetings to film festivals.

Nikita Mikhalkov doesn't let us pass. "Vodka!" We have to have a shot. We do as we're told.

Kurosawa thinks we're amusing.

CUT TO

TRACKING SHOT past masterpieces in the Uffizi Gallery

Utrillo, Raphael, Titian, Caravaggio, Botticelli's Venus on the half-shell. One after another after another. Overwhelming. Such greatness … am I getting annoyed?

Polaroids from **MARTIN SCORSESE COLLECTION, NY**

By Martin Scorsese

We're taking in the museum. He goes one way, I go another.

We lose each other.

Eventually, I leave the building. I see him sitting on the stoop, dejected. He looks up, quiet-like: "We're bums."

"Yeah, we're bums," I said.

Not so cool.

**

What are we doing, after seeing all that? Could we ever do anything again? Could we go through the fire again? That's how he said it. Always "the fire."

Laughing helped. But was it all stamped out of us?

**

On the road somewhere in Italy. We pull into a rest stop. Have to use the restroom.

Told: None available. "Go out back."

We're standing there, pissing. White porcelain all around us. We look. Toilets. Forty or more of them, just sitting there. Helter-skelter. Gleaming white, brand-new. On the ground, waiting. Waiting for … what? Did they fall off the back of a truck?

What the hell are we doing?

**

I woke up some time in September '78 and slipped – comfortably this time – into *Raging Bull*.

He came back in on *Raging Bull,* and he stayed till *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

ALL-NIGHT MOVIES

Night – angle down on hands sharpening a straight razor – worn, dupey black-and-white images

CLOSE on the man doing the sharpening, a cigarette in his mouth – he bears a suspicious resemblance to Luis Buñuel

He tests the blade on his thumbnail, opens a French door to a balcony, gazes up at the night sky

A thin cloud approaches the full moon

CLOSE on the face of a woman, looking at us – he opens her left eye with his fingers – lifts the razor and starts slicing

The cloud slices through the moon

CLOSE on the eye as the razor slices it open – fluid pours out

Words on the screen: "Eight years later"

Really?

What kind of narrative was this? What did they want us to think?

But, why not? It's *always* eight years later …

**

Screening films. 16mm prints, usually bad copies. All night long in that house on Mulholland.

I threw Rossellini and Visconti and Fuller at him. He preferred Bergman, Cocteau, and Buñuel. He loved Buñuel.

"Eight years later"

Color images, French

A dinner party is in progress – impeccably mannered upper-middle-class Europeans, chatting politely, eating pâté

The doorbell rings – an entire company of soldiers in fatigues walks in – embarrassment: they were expected the next day but maneuvers have started ahead of schedule

The hostess steps in and offers to feed everyone – tables and chairs are set up – absurd conversation over drinks – the Colonel shares a joint with his second-in-command and politely passes it to the other guests

The meal starts at two cramped tables – apologies for the small portions

Another soldier at the door, a Sergeant – "Message from HQ for the Colonel" – the Green Army has attacked so, unfortunately, they have to leave

The soldiers stand and offer their apologies – they are ready to go when the Sergeant whispers in the Colonel's ear

The Colonel is delighted – "The Sergeant has a charming dream he would like to tell you about" – everyone sits down again – "We're listening"

The Sergeant takes off his helmet and tucks it under his am, assumes a melancholy air, and starts his recitation – "Last week, I had a dream ..."

The story stopped for the dream. He loved that. No dividing line between reality and the dream. He loved it. For the sphinx, there was no difference.

Why can't all stories stop like that? Stop for dreams ...

**

More films, more music.

Alida Valli running down purple streets of Venice screaming "Franz! Franz!" – the sky above her is mauve and rose – Bruckner's seventh symphony surges. Visconti's *Senso* ends. Faded print.

We get up, drift outside.

The sky above us is mauve and rose. We're still in the Visconti film. Inside and outside.

The sun is coming up. The only thing left to do was to put on "Tupelo Honey." That's what always happened. Van and "Tupelo Honey." It was sort of our sign off.

MUSIC SCHOOL

It wasn't always Bruckner and Praetorious. Most of it was blues, rock, gospel, folk, country, Gil Evans and Miles Davis, Nass El-Ghiwane, Willie Dixon, the American Songbook.

I put on the Sex Pistols. It always irritated him. "Turn it down. They have no musicianship."

Listening. Years of listening. Songs. Mixes. Sounds. And words. His words, about the music that he was hearing in his head. Words that themselves embodied music and became music. Words that communicated sensual states that made me anticipate what the music would sound like.

I listened to him. We found a common language.

Listening to cicadas, for *Silence*. Cicadas in early September in Kyushu, cicadas in late August in Hokkaido, all different kinds of sounds of cicadas in different parts of Japan and at different times of year.

They even made their way into *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

I wanted a harmonica for *The Irishman*. The feeling of the music for *Touchez pas au Grisbi*. I slipped Robbie a copy of the soundtrack. He found a great French harmonica player, Frederic Yonnet – and they got it.

I said, "Give me something dangerous and fleshy." For the moment when Leo drops off Lily from his cab at her house in *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

Robbie came back with a theme driven by guitar, bass, harmonica – dangerous and fleshy. More than I asked for. It helped drive the whole picture.

There had to be another theme, expansive and bold, something that would match the scale of the landscape itself, the prairies and the hills. He came back with a gusher of sound, to match the oil shooting up from the earth ... coyotes and wolf calls.

AERIAL SHOT

A wooden ship out on the open sea. The ship is your whole world. And you're lost and alone in the universe, circling through the ether.

Maybe you're one of the luckless ones, on a ship commanded by a madman and driven to obliteration – you're cast adrift like Ishmael, just another orphan picked up by another devious-cruising ship in search of her missing children, you alone have escaped to tell thee.

The majesty. The romance. The danger. The madness. Swirling together in one full-force gale. What I felt in Melville and images from 19th-century America, he must have felt too. We never talked about it. We didn't really have to. It was there in his music, the music he made with Levon Helm and Richard Manuel and Garth Hudson and Rick Danko, the music he made on his own, the music he made for my films.

Those first Band records, that aggregate sound – organ, guitar, the different voices, all coming out of a mysterious place called Big Pink ... the songs – the world of tricksters and rogues, unfaithful servants

and vigilantes, hardship and deliverance, hymns and murder ballads, Shenandoah and Cripple Creek, Daniel and the sacred harp, Carmen and the devil walking side by side, the flying Dutchman's on the reef ... it was as vast as the continent, it was influenced by everything and nothing, it was completely original, and it came right out of the soil, the beauty and the tragedy of this place called North America.

THE LAST WALTZ

Planning the picture. Shooting. Editing. Mixing. It kept me alive for those two years.

The screenings. The impact of all those songs and performances. Almost every time we screened it, Wim Wenders was there.

The Cannes screening. On our way up the red carpet, some people in the crowd shouted "Fascists!" Perplexed by that. But cool. Nice ovation, though, after the screening.

"Fascists!" Really? We always wondered about that, over the years.

THANKSGIVING DAY 1978

Two years after the Last Waltz concert, a few months after the film was out in theaters. Thanksgiving dinner at my house on Mulholland. The Jonestown massacre happened.

Michelangelo Antonioni was in town. We invited him to spend this American holiday with us.

I think Michelangelo was perplexed by our laughter, but we were alive again, gone through the worst of it all.

Every year at Thanksgiving, remembering the Last Waltz, we would have a phone call to check in. It was a ritual.

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN'S ON THE REEF

My 80th-birthday party. A big affair, but nice feeling in the room.

Robbie walks up to the microphone. There's a surprise.

He starts talking about our friendship. "There were certain artists that we were drawn to in a cinematic way, in just an incredible, soulful, musical way. We connected on these things. Sometimes these artists just kept coming back, circling around, and we could never resist them."

Then he introduced Van Morrison.

**

A few months later. One last dinner in L.A.

"Eight Years Later" ... and those toilets in the field behind the rest stop and the mauve and rose sky we shared with Alida Valli and ... did they really think we were fascists?

At the end of the night he said, "Sorry I was a little slow on the draw."

He never talked much about being sick.

Now I'm mad again. I'm mad he didn't get the blessing of seeing people experience his work on the score of *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

But still, he got the grace to create it.

I don't think I'm going to listen to "Tupelo Honey" anymore.

MELINDA SUE GORDON

Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio in *Killers of the Flower Moon*

Highlights From a 50-Year Partnership

'We speak the same language in a sense,' Robertson said of Scorsese. Here are six films that captured the filmmaker and musician in dialogue

'The Last Waltz'
1976

Robertson first heard Scorsese's name when his manager, Jonathan Taplin, told him about a young guy directing a movie he was producing (that would be *Mean Streets*). When it came time to enlist a filmmaker to capture the Band's final concert in San Francisco, on Thanksgiving Day 1976, Scorsese was the first person he thought of. The result remains an era-defining concert film, matching Robertson's incendiary solos with the restless camera movements. Scorsese's idea of shooting "The Weight" on an MGM soundstage like an old-school musical number impressed Robertson to no end. **DAVID FEAR**

'Raging Bull'
1980

Scorsese enlisted Robertson to produce the soundtrack for his masterpiece about champion boxer Jake La Motta; he'd also end up scoring and arranging three pieces, and co-wrote some of the source music. Robertson recruited Garth Hudson and Richard Manuel to help record covers of period standards, but he himself didn't play with his old Band-mates, since, he said, "I had recently broken my hand in an unfortunate confrontation." La Motta would have been sympathetic. **D.F.**

'The King of Comedy'
1983

The soundtrack Robertson pulled together for this film about a would-be comedy star balanced New Wave pop (Talking Heads' "Swamp" and Ric Ocasek's "Steal the Night") with more ruminative picks like Ray Charles' "Come Rain or Come Shine," and Robertson's own atmospheric "Between Trains," which demonstrated what he had to offer outside the Band. Van Morrison's simmering takedown "Wonderful Remark" wasn't the movie's theme song, but easily could have been. **DAVID BROWNE**

'The Color of Money'
1986

Robertson made his debut as a score composer on Scorsese's sequel to 1961's *The Hustler*. Eric Clapton's "It's in the Way That You Use It," co-written with Robertson, was its signature blues-rock tune, and Robertson's two largely instrumental tracks, recorded with jazz composer and bandleader Gil Evans, enhanced the film's pool-hall vibe. And Robertson captured the competitive, macho verve of the movie's setting in tracks by Warren Zevon, Don Henley, and a Robertson-produced song by blues icon Willie Dixon. **D.B.**

'The Irishman'
2019

Scorsese's epic mob movie takes place over 50 years, which meant Robertson's contributions to the score had to work across decades. His main theme combines a John Bonham-esque backbeat with a stark-sounding harmonica and a genuinely haunting cello — it's not the sound of a gangster movie so much as a ghost story. That feeling is beautifully repeated in "Remembrance," which plays over the end credits and features some of the bluesiest guitar playing of Robertson's career. **D.F.**

'Killers of the Flower Moon'
2023

For Scorsese's true-crime tale about murders among the Osage Nation in the 1920s, Robertson said he "created what I called a North American Indian jukebox," drawing on his own Mohawk and Cayuga background to compose bits and pieces of soundscapes that he'd send to Scorsese. Though he composed the score, that's also him playing the slide guitar on the movie's opening track, adding an otherworldly drone to the tune's percussive momentum. "That's all me," he said. "That was my gift to Marty." **D.F.**

Trans Boxers Are Stepping Into the Ring. Will the Sport Let Them Stay?

BY BEN WYATT

Patricio Manuel (right) during his third professional mens fight

PATRICIO MANUEL sits silently backstage at the Fantasy Springs Resort Casino. He's in the back corner of the white-tarpaulined gazebo as he waits to be called to the ring of the 3,000-seater events center here in Indio, California.

Inside the thin tent walls, he can hear the hubbub of spectators already seated in the arena and the bass-y bursts of rap intermittently being used to warm up the PA system. But neither seem to bother the glazed-eyed boxer as he rubs his beard. Focused.

It's been eight weeks of running drills, eating right, and heavy sparring for Manuel to be ripped and ready for this, his third professional bout, and potentially toughest yet. Physically, the 38-year-old is in great shape – his lean, tattooed torso of super-featherweight brawn hitting the scales on the 130-pound mark at the weigh-in the day before.

All that Manuel's sagacious head coach Victor Valenzuela can do now is fine-tune his fighter's composure. He knows that the usual high-stakes danger of boxing will be coupled with historical stakes tonight. That's because Manuel is a rare talent of the sport: a five-time women's national amateur champion and former female Olympic trialist, whose transition in 2013 led him to become the first trans man to fight professionally on American soil.

In his first pro fight after his transition, in 2018, Manuel made history by defeating Hugo Aguilar in a unanimous-decision points victory. The win of a trans fighter over a cisgender man proved so controversial that it took five years of hustle, knock backs, and determination for Manuel to book his follow-up. When he did, in March of this year, a second victory followed: a technical knockout against Hieu Huynh. Tonight will be yet another step down this uncharted and challenging path.

Tonight's bout nearly didn't happen. Thirty-year-old lightweight Alexander Gutierrez confirmed his participation just two days before the weigh-in – an unsettling 11th-hour call that denied Manuel the usual benefit of being able to study his opponent as part of his preparation, and one that left Gutierrez sweating off pounds at short notice to make weight. But as a pro with just two fights in 10 years, Manuel was in no mind to complain: "I was like, honestly, fuck it. What can I say? I just wanna fight, and I don't have much longer in this sport. Any chance I get is an opportunity for me to do what I love."

Most boxing careers demand blood and bravura in equal measure, but in Manuel's case, his identity as a fighter has required him to overcome prejudice, too. Which is why tonight is so important, and why composure now is so key.

Manuel's eyes follow Valenzuela as the coach starts to wind the cotton wraps over his tattooed knuckles. Each bind covers another inked letter from the words "bash back."

Next, Manuel puts on his fight gear: black silk shorts adorned with an orange trim designed by a local African boutique, in honor of ancestors on his father's side.

Referee Jack Reiss visits the tent to brief him on the rules of engagement in the ring and to check Manuel's groin protector. "Hey," Reiss says before he leaves, "good luck out there, man."

As his gloves are laced, Manuel's expression hardens. Valenzuela pats him on the shoulder and smiles. Manuel nods back, ready. Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog" plays on the dressing-room speakers as they walk from the tent through the black-curtained drapes to the lights and the fenced-off walkway that leads to the ring. The time has come to rock & roll.

BOXING HAS ALWAYS been a sport for the outcast. Instead of college scholarships and pre-Olympic programs, the big talents have, more often than not, been drawn from society's most deprived, where trauma and lack of opportunity bake in a capacity to persist through pain.

Consequently, one of the unwritten rules of the boxing gym – the kind of joint where floorboards come stained in sweat and where communication can be monosyllabic – is that everyone is welcome. In a sport that relies on the underclass for future growth, much like the church, it pays not to be picky.

Which is maybe why so many who have suffered rejection in other areas of their life find solace in the bag work and sparring, where respect is earned through hard, physical workouts, discipline, and through the courage it takes to step up and fight. It's a rare mentality but a powerful one that can unite across race, age, ability, and gender in the dank, sweat-laced air of a gym.

The key to this communion is leaving all other identity classifications, save that of a fighter, at the gym door. But now boxing – following in the footsteps of swimming, track, cycling, and even the checkered battlegrounds of international chess – is grappling with how best to respond to the desire of trans athletes to compete at the highest levels.

In December, when Mauricio Sulaimán, the president of the World Boxing Council (WBC) – one of the four major organizations that govern boxing globally – announced his intention to create a "transgender division" where fighters would only be allowed to take on opponents of the "same birth sex," it was met with hostility by many fighters within the trans community. Not only did it strike trans boxers like Manuel, whose very status as a professional would effectively be outlawed under the new guidelines, as headline-making posturing, it also seemed to fly in the face of grassroot boxing's ethos of inclusivity.

"I don't wanna be in a trans division, you know?" Manuel says. "I understand there may [be] some people that feel more comfortable with that label, and I can't speak for them, but every time I walk into a gym, every time I go sparring, I'm perceived as a man. For me, there is no other way to compete other than in the male division. To have a leader of my sport saying that I don't get to be a man, that I can't compete even though I've been out here doing just that, you know, it really hurts."

For Manuel, the boxing gym has long been a place he felt a sense of acceptance, ever since he walked into the now-closed L.A. Boxing and Fitness Club 20 years ago. "I'm gonna misgender myself here, but there was a trainer, and he goes, 'I hope she's here to box. She looks tough.' For someone like me, who

Nolan Hanson founded a group for trans boxers at Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPH BY CRIS ESQUEDA/GOLDEN BOY

BEN WYATT *is a freelance writer and founder of the multimedia journalism company Comuniqé.*

didn't feel tough, but always wanted to, I knew at that moment that I belonged in the space."

At that point, many things felt out of his control: He'd changed schools, sending his grades into a plummet, and he'd gained weight after giving up martial arts and softball. Puberty exacerbated his gender dysphoria, leaving him feeling "disconnected," he says, from his body.

The boxing gym, thanks to classes his grandma gave him for Christmas, not only provided structure amid the confusion – but also an outlet for his rage.

"It's three minutes of work time and then a break. It's always the same. There's a rhythm, a regimen and discipline, and it made me feel more comfortable than any other place in the world," he says.

With diligent training, Manuel was soon seeking out fights in the L.A. area, turning up to local women's tournaments on "Friday, Saturday, and Sunday," he says, to get as much ring time as possible, filling in for no-shows and dropouts.

It took years of hard work and persistence to build a reputation in the amateurs, but by the time a professional career beckoned in the burgeoning women's division, Manuel faced a life-changing decision that threatened to end his ambitions as a fighter entirely. "I figured I could go into the female division and try to be a world champion, one of the greatest in the sport. And that's no disrespect to other female fighters, that's just me acknowledging that for myself. Or I could take a risk and be true to myself."

Hanson had taught classes across the country before landing at Gleason's. "I found a lot of acceptance here," he says.

Manuel chose the latter, and began hormone therapy in 2013. A year later, he underwent top surgery. Following guidelines laid down by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), his gender affirmation surgery and two-year hormone-replacement therapy qualified him to return to the ring as a trans man, and in 2016, USA Boxing (USAB) granted Manuel a passbook to fight as an amateur male.

It was during this time that he turned to Valenzuela, a California Boxing Hall of Fame inductee who had taught many of the opponents Manuel had fought as a female amateur. Valenzuela ran the Duarte Boxing Gym from its base at the town's teen center and had a reputation for molding champions.

"I just told Pat that you're just gonna be trained just like one of the guys. Nothing different. We're gonna work hard. You're a boxer, that's it," Valenzuela says. All these years later, their partnership remains tight.

"Everybody's well aware that Pat's transitioned, and a lot of the guys and coaches didn't want to fight him," the coach says. "They think they have nothing to gain by it: Win, and you beat somebody that was a female. Lose, you got beat by somebody that was a woman."

The professional fights Manuel has fought thus far have come in no small measure due to the support of Golden Boy Promotions, a match-making company founded by boxing legend Oscar De La Hoya that is one of the biggest in the sport. When Eric Gómez, president of Golden Boy, read a *Los Angeles Times* article about Manuel in 2018, he felt "compelled" to reach out to sign him.

"It was an incredible story ... and I said, 'You're already a champion, just going through what you went through and the transition.' And if the dream [is] to fight a professional boxing match as a male, I wanted to help whichever way I could," Gómez says.

"So I got together with my partner Oscar [De La Hoya] and we discussed it, and Oscar said yes. [But] one thing we said to each other is 'We're not doing this for publicity. We're not going to announce it. We're not going to put it out there. [If] people find out [about Manuel's transition] that's fine, but let's just do it.' And we did it. [We're] just trying to be good human beings."

THE FIRST ROUND goes largely to plan.

Manuel, though only around a pound heavier than Gutierrez, is more muscular, and uses his heft to establish an early advantage, double-jabbing the body and head to set up left hooks and overhand rights, always moving forward. He's been a front-foot puncher his whole career, preferring to pressurize rivals, landing power shots on the inside, even if [*Cont. on 76*]

"I figured I could go into the female division and try to be a world champion ... or I could be true to myself."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRIFFIN LOTZ

The Passion — of —

JULIA FOX

JULIA FOX HAS LONG BEEN A NEW YORK CITY IT GIRL. BUT WITH HER NEW MEMOIR, 'DOWN THE DRAIN,' SHE'S PROVING THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO HER THAN THAT

BY EJ DICKSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHIE SHAZAM

I AM ON A DATE WITH JULIA FOX – at least, that's what it feels like. We're in the dimly lit VIP suite at Body by Brooklyn, a spa inconspicuously tucked under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway in Clinton Hill. We're wearing fluffy terry-cloth robes; there are rose petals inexplicably strewn all over a bubble bath, which neither of us will get into. And about a minute and a half after I meet her, right before we're about to get massages, she gestures at me to take my bathing suit top off.

"Wait, babe, you have to take off the thing," she says in her signature drawl, a hybrid of Drew Barrymore's SoCal lilt and deadpan alt-left podcast-host vocal fry. "How are they gonna touch your back through your bathing suit?"

It's a fair point. I had worn the one-piece to make Fox feel comfortable – but also, having recently seen Fox in a see-through glass bustier at Cannes, and having had a kid within the past year, it struck me as bor-

derline masochistic to be naked in front of her. She's amused by my prudery, but understanding. "I want you to have a great massage experience," she says.

R&R does not come easily to Fox these days. She is a woman who wears many hats: model; actor; muse to Josh Safdie in *Uncut Jahhms,* per the infamous viral clip; influencer; former paramour and Carbone dining partner to the world's most famous rapper-slash-anti-Semite; and mom to two-and-a-half-year-old son Valentino, whom she will pick up from day care shortly. When I meet her, she is quite literally wearing one – a baseball cap from Diesel, paired with ruffled white shorts, bejeweled flats from Dsquared2, and a T-shirt of three Middle Eastern female bodybuilders, her hair dyed a vibrant shade of puce. (She looks fucking incredible, and, no, much like everything else Fox wears, you cannot pull it off.)

In October, Fox will be donning another hat: that of a memoirist with the release of her book, *Down the Drain*. Over spring rolls and pad thai, Fox says she wrote the book in a "vortex," on the two days a week when her ex, Peter Artemiev, has custody of Valentino. As a child, writing a book was a dream of hers, though she gave up on the idea after having one of her pieces read out loud by a middle school English teacher and mocked by her classmates. "I was like, 'I really can't ever share how I'm feeling because it's not going to be received well,' " she remembers thinking. "If I was shut down then, that really sealed it for me."

After reading *Down the Drain* – or, for that matter, after hearing Fox talk in pretty much any context, anywhere – it's hard to imagine a time when she was ever unwilling to share. She is the queen of self-disclosure, giving tours of her messy apartment on TikTok, speaking openly about her past with drugs and sex work, and famously penning an account of her date night with aforementioned ex Kanye West for *Interview Magazine* (though, as she recounts in the book, that account was far less straightforward than it appeared).

"If you can't handle the truth, that's your fucking problem," she says, and *Down the Drain* does not disappoint in this regard. It's full of harrowing tales of overdoses, abusive relationships with drug addicted ex-boyfriends, pregnancy loss, sexual assault, parental neglect, and shitting in the locker of a bullying rival dominatrix (though technically Fox did not shit in the locker so much as shit in a toilet and scoop it out).

But in truth, the version of Fox that the public has become acquainted with is distinct from the one in *Down the Drain*. The condom tube tops, the high-profile relationships, the extreme smoky eye – Fox's memoir makes clear that these are essentially armor. It's one of many ways in which a woman whose youth, glamour, and beauty have prompted people, mostly men, to project their own desires onto her, resists them doing so.

Senior writer EJ DICKSON *profiled Danielle Bregoli – a.k.a. Bhad Bhabie – earlier this year.*

"It's performative," says Briana Andalore, Fox's stylist and longtime best friend. "She has to feed the baby, right? She has to put a roof over his head. Our mentality has always been, you gotta do what you gotta do. That's been our mentality our whole existence. It's a survivor mentality."

> "I MANIFESTED BEING A SINGLE MOM FOR MYSELF," SHE SAYS. "JUST BECAUSE I'VE LEARNED THAT MEN FUCK EVERYTHING UP."

Fox has become so synonymous with New York City that it's hard to imagine her living elsewhere; in a city of transplants, she seems a rare orchid, albeit one in horse-tail and latex assless chaps. But she was actually born in Italy, living with her mother and grandfather there until she was six, then moving to New York to live with her itinerant father.

In "DOWN THE Drain," Fox describes a childhood in which she was treated largely as a nuisance and left to her own devices, making caramels with sugar and a lighter in front of the TV at her grandfather's, or being locked in her room and using the cat-litter box for a bathroom while her dad was at work. "My childhood was definitely fucked up," she says. "But now that I'm a parent, I can have more understanding and see where my dad was not equipped. He was doing what he thought was right." Fox is far less generous toward her mother, who lives in Italy with her younger brother: "She's very anxious, very cold. [As a parent], I just try to do everything the opposite of her."

With her parents out of the picture, Fox largely grew up unsupervised, shoplifting from Upper East Side department stores and experimenting with drugs and sex starting in middle school.

In *Down the Drain,* Fox writes about being sexualized at an early age, getting high and fooling around with a 26-year-old at the age of 11 and taking pride in the eighth-grade boy who would grope her and compliment her ass whenever she walked down the hall at school. Life "was about surviving for the both of us," says Andalore. "We could just lock arms and live together without words, seeing eye to eye. Scheming and scamming was our love language."

In many ways, *Down the Drain* is a book about objectification: both about the psychic toll it takes, as well as Fox's efforts to navigate the world by alternately resisting or embracing it. "I think for a long time, I was a 'pick me,' " Fox says, using a term for women who seek out male approval. "I wanted to be hot and look good and have men like me and fawn all over me. I didn't care if it took a toll on who I really am. It [took] a lot of denial and a lot of lying to yourself."

Very quickly, Fox learned that while her looks could open some doors – "It helped us get into clubs," Andalore says – they could also lead her to some dark places. At 14, she met her first great love, a drug dealer who is identified as "Ace" in the book, whom she alleges was both physically and emotionally abusive, tracking her whereabouts and sending her threatening letters. Andalore, who lived with Fox at the time, says witnessing the relationship was deeply painful and that it had a long-standing impact on Fox: "It creates trauma that you don't deal with in the moment," she says. "Trauma comes in waves. You might not be experiencing it today or tomorrow or a month from now, but you never know when it's going to creep up and affect you."

At the time, Fox blamed herself for the abuse. "I have a lot of shame around it," Fox says. "When women are put into abusive situations, we often [are] like, 'How could I have been so dumb to let that happen?' That part was probably the hardest, just having to reopen things that I had really pushed out of my mind." She ended up in a mental institution from the stress.

It was that experience with Ace that prompted Fox to come out last year in support of another widely misunderstood female celebrity, Amber Heard, at a time when no other celebrities were doing so. She felt compelled to defend Heard, even though she received panicked phone calls from her team telling her not to. "I said to my friends, 'The tides are gonna turn eventually,' " she says. "And that's the thing: If I just know and believe in my heart that I'm right, then I don't give a fuck what anyone else has to say."

When she was in her late teens, Fox started working as a dominatrix, which appealed to her, she writes, due to the lack of penetrative sex involved and her "experience in hating men." (She also came up with a fairly ingenious way to use a funnel, though squeamish readers may wish to skip that part.) "It was like, 'Listen, I'm gonna be objectified either way,' " she recalls thinking. " 'So I might as well just capitalize on it and own it.' "

Fox loved the job; after years of her sexuality being weaponized against her, she found being able to monetize it empowering. "I went into it thinking, 'I'm a piece of shit, I'm not worth anything. No mat-

HAIR BY JOHN NOVOTNY FOR OPUS BEAUTY USING ORIBE. MAKEUP BY JULIAN STOLLER FOR OPUS BEAUTY USING SHISEIDO ARCHLINER INK STYLO EYELINER INK. STYLING BY BRIANA ANDALORE. PREVIOUS SPREAD: VEIL BY NAMILIA. CHOKER BY BOOTZY COUTURE. BODYSUIT BY NAMILIA. SHOES BY PLEASERS. THIS PAGE: DRESS BY ПОЛИНА МИЛАЕВА.

ter how many times someone would tell me, 'You're beautiful, you're so hot,' the only thing I listened to was the money. I'm getting booked the most often. I have the most clients. So I could quantify it. I could see it. And then I had to believe it," she says. "So it really helped with my self-worth."

It's easy to see why she was so successful: In person, Fox is warm without being ingratiating, and gracious without being irritating. But there's also an aloofness to Fox, who rarely smiles and tends to fix her unblinking blue eyes on you, as if she's trying to gauge whether you're compelling enough to be worth her time. "Inside, she's warm and sweet and loving and giving," says Andalore. "But there's a very hard and intense exterior on the outside." You get the sense that this quality would be devastatingly appealing to a certain type of man who would view it as a challenge, and also that she largely had to develop it out of necessity.

"I've always been intuitive in that way, where I have a pretty good track record of being like, 'That's such a bad person,' and then arguing with my friends over it, and then fast-forward, they're a bad person. And I'm like, 'See, I told you so,'" she says. "When you grow up in the city, and you're on your own, you kind of have to be hypervigilant. You do get to learn to read people and read between the lines and hear the unspoken things."

Throughout her twenties, Fox became well-known on the downtown party circuit, briefly running a fashion line with Andalore that was financed primarily by Fox's boyfriend at the time, a wealthy older man she met through her work as a domme whom she identifies as Antoine in her memoir. Fox characterizes this period as intensely stressful – not just because her livelihood and those of her friends were dependent on her relationship, but because of the psychic toll of performing for Antoine, who she says nicknamed her "*poupée,*" French for "doll."

Older men "saw me as the version of me that they created in their mind, like a young, carefree, spirited, adventurous, attractive, youthful, energized [woman]," she says. "In reality, I was jaded, and hanging on by a thread. But obviously, I wasn't going to shatter their expectations, because that doesn't benefit me. So I'm going to act like I am these things until it wears on my soul."

Eventually, the seams started to show. As Fox writes in her book, the relationship with Antoine ended when he discovered she was sleeping with another man, and she and her friends had to scramble to support themselves. "She had to grow up really fast and figure things out and take care of herself and hustle and grind and provide for herself," says her best friend, model and photographer Richie Shazam, who lived with her at the time. "And she always found a way. She literally always found a way."

Before the fashion line ended, Fox invested the majority of her savings in a club with the other man, a relationship that imploded after he allegedly attacked her at the club. Fox publicly spoke out against him, and much like Amber Heard, she says, she was "ostracized and punished" by her social circle for doing so. "At every corner, there were people talking about me and calling me crazy and saying that I was jealous and made it up," she says. (Through a lawyer, the ex previously denied the charges to the *New York Post*.)

After that, Fox left New York, briefly moving to Louisiana. She started using heroin more regularly, staying in contact with old friends only intermittently. "That was petrifying for me," Andalore says. "I was afraid she wouldn't wake up one day." When a friend invited Fox to meet in New York and fly down to Miami on a billionaire's private jet, she jumped at the chance. On the jet, she alleges in *Down the Drain,* she was roofied and sexually assaulted by an unnamed billionaire, an incident she did not report to the police. "I already knew what happened when I tried to call the police and stand up for myself," she says. "There was nothing I could do. So the only thing that seemed like the rational thing to do was pretend it didn't happen."

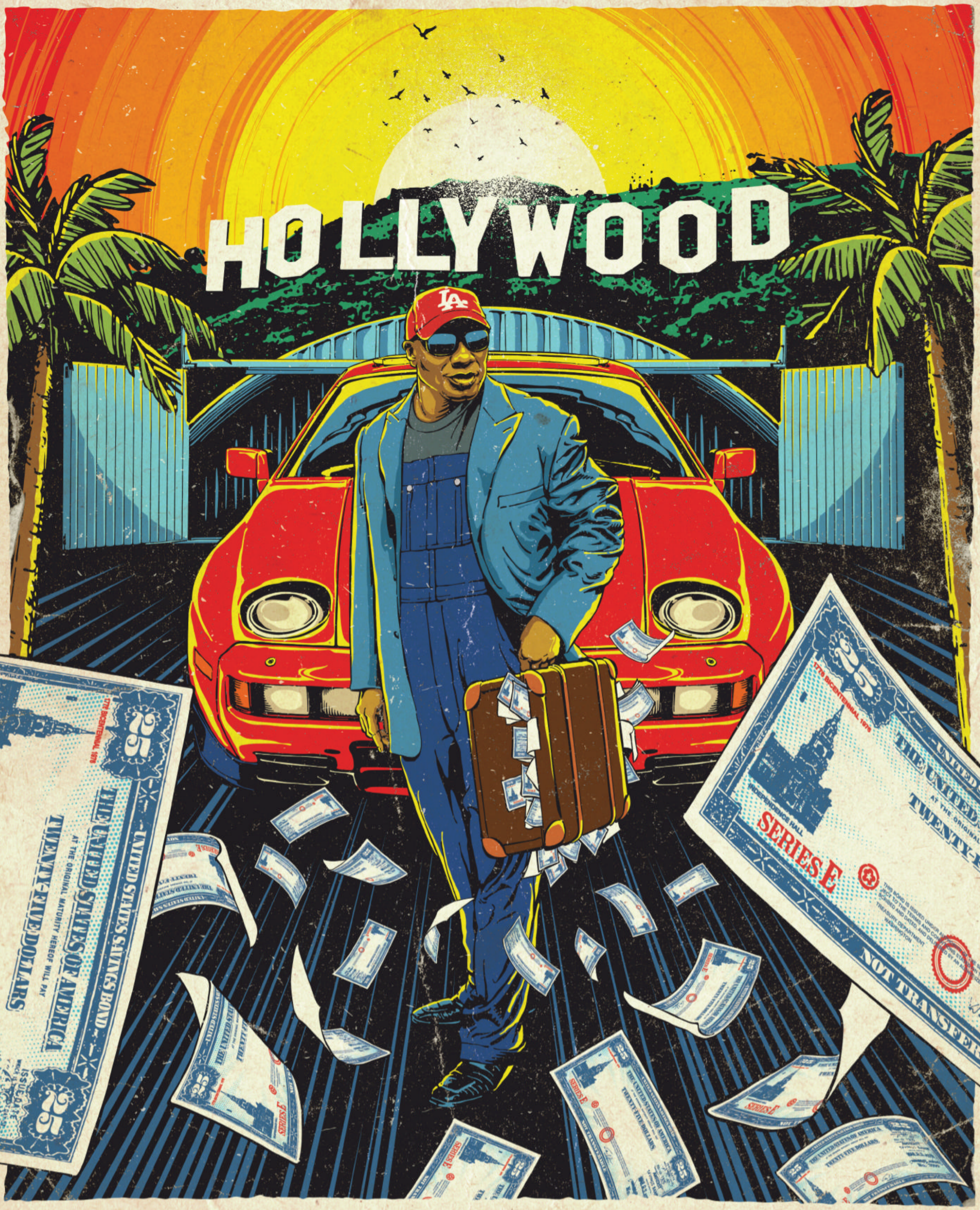
Fox's breakout role as Julia, the vampy mistress of Adam Sandler's sleazy diamond dealer in 2019's *Uncut Gems,* could not have come at a better time. On paper, the part, which the Safdie brothers wrote specifically for her, could have easily fit into the category of manic-pixie-dream-hottie roles that older men projected onto her. But Fox says it did not, largely because she played an active role in shaping the trajectory of the character (it was her idea, [*Cont. on 74*]

THE CON, THE CON ARTIST, and Me

by **SEAN WILLIAMS**

Illustrations and lettering
by **BUTCHER BILLY**

MAVERICK MILES PICKED ME TO TELL THE STORY OF HIS LARGER-THAN-LIFE COUNTERFEITING RING, BUT IT TURNED OUT HE WAS TRYING TO MAKE ME AN ACCOMPLICE TO HIS GREATEST SCAM OF ALL.


HOLLYWOOD
LA
17TH BICENTENNIAL 1976
THE UNITED STATES SAVINGS BOND
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AT THE ORIGINAL MATURITY HEREOF WILL PAY
TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS
SERIES E
17TH BICENTENNIAL 1976
INDEPENDENCE HALL
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS
NOT TRANSFERA

AT 5:44 P.M. ON FEB. 23, 2022, my phone lit up with a WhatsApp message from a stranger. "Hello Sean Williams," he wrote. "I have something for you."

Seconds later, the stranger sent a link to a Spectrum 1 News interview with a retired LAPD cop and writer named Cheryl Dorsey. Dorsey had penned a biography titled *The CONfidence Chronicles,* about a "Black criminal genius" named Maverick Miles Nehemiah, who'd swindled the U.S. government out of $20 million via counterfeit savings bonds in the Eighties. Nehemiah hadn't cashed the bonds himself, Dorsey told the reporter in the interview. Rather, he'd enlisted three women and three men – the "All-American Team," as he called them – whose skin color wouldn't raise the eyebrows of racist bank tellers.

Nehemiah had served five years in prison for the scam, Dorsey explained in the clip, and he'd since built a business refurbishing vintage Porsche 928s out of a downtown L.A. hangar. Now, Dorsey explained, Nehemiah was ready to share his tale with the world. "It's a story of redemption," she told the reporter.

Seven minutes later, the stranger sent me a third message. "I've been very careful in selecting the 'right' journalist with this one-of-a-kind true-crime story Sean," it read. "As I remain, in hope and trust, Maverick Miles Nehemiah."

Dorsey had already been a go-to police expert for cable-news shows before writing *The CONfidence Chronicles,* and she had plugged the book via appearances on MSNBC, CNN, and others. But she had failed to secure a contract, and sales of the self-published result had flagged. Maverick wanted a major magazine to cover his story, too.

"I'd be lying," I wrote him back, "if I said I weren't interested."

The following day, Maverick emailed me a PDF copy of Dorsey's book. *The CONfidence Chronicles* had all the ingredients of a true-crime classic – even if, on first glance, many of its details read jarringly like fiction. In it, Maverick, the Texas-raised adopted son of a Pueblo Indian pianist mother and Black airman father, channeled increasing disillusionment with America's history of racism, and failed shots at pro football, into a daredevil scheme to defraud the government – perfecting counterfeit U.S. Treasury bonds, before dispatching his hand-selected All-American Team to cash them, or "walk the paper" as he called it, in banks up and down the country. He decked out his counterfeit runners with flashy clothes and went on trips to the Caribbean. But his own motivations ran deeper. "Maverick believed that this country had then and continues to this day – an agenda to 'keep Black people down,'" Dorsey wrote. "Maverick went after the government's money." He'd aimed to walk $50 million of the bonds. But one of the so-called All-American Team, a hard-drinking Midwesterner he called "Delilah," had, "because of her greed and betrayal," wrote Dorsey, hit banks on her own, gotten arrested, and snitched.

I wanted to know much more, and Maverick was happy to oblige, reaching out via text, video, or voice notes – oftentimes while driving in the dead of night, jazz and funk classics playing in the background. That March, I interviewed him for my crime podcast, and by May the exchanges had become, in his words, "our journey." That spring, ROLLING STONE commissioned me to write about Maverick, and I texted him the news. "I always know that positive thoughts bring about positive results," he replied. "I'm just grateful to you for making this effort."

In October, the magazine flew me to Atlanta, the city of Maverick's youth. We spent a week driving around in his gunmetal Porsche Cayenne. Maverick showed me where he lived and went to school – and banks he said he'd hit with his All-Americans. One afternoon, he drove me to a red-brick warehouse on the south side of town where, he claimed, he'd spent almost two years perfecting the art of counterfeiting. His "theme tune," he told me, was David Bowie's "Criminal World." His mantra: "A scared man can't make any money."

Maverick could talk for yards, and he ate almost as eagerly. We dined lavishly at high-end restaurants, where he never drank alcohol and began several meals with dessert. He insisted on paying, and on a couple of occasions, I agreed – one of many decisions I'd later regret.

After I settled up for our final steak dinner, at Atlanta's Ritz-Carlton hotel, Maverick took me to his room and handed me a crisp, cellophane-wrapped bill. It was a red, white, and blue $25 "Bicentennial-design Series E" bond, first issued in 1975 to commemorate the Revolutionary War: the exact bond that, according to *The CONfidence Chronicles,* Maverick had counterfeited thousands of times for what he euphemistically called the "caper." "Don't show this to many people," he said softly. "It's just for you."

Then I returned home to London. Maverick and I communicated daily on WhatsApp. But I struggled to write the story. He said he didn't have any transcripts from the bond case, claiming the U.S. government had sealed it on security grounds. Contacts had either died, vanished, or refused to speak. "Delilah" was a woman named Ann Morgan in Springfield, Illinois, he told me. But I couldn't find her either. (I'd later figure out that this name was a slight variation of that of a real woman he dated.) The only All-American Team member I did track down – a former model in L.A. – told me she'd barely been involved, and that she'd met the other team members only twice, at an Atlanta diner.

By February 2023, I was getting desperate, and ROLLING STONE assigned me a researcher. On Feb. 28, she emailed me, "Look at this!" It was a 2017 post at RipOffReport, a notice board for people who claim to be victims of scam artists and skulduggery, about "Maverick Mann," a.k.a. "Maverick Marsalis." "Every word out his mouth is a lie. He's a pathological liar whose main goal is to steal you blind," it read. "The man has no soul."

My heart skipped. It seemed I'd been taken for a long ride.

I needed to start from the beginning – to figure out the full story of Maverick. The more I dug, the more the saga took shape. He'd presented himself as a righteous Robin Hood figure – a counterfeiter driven by moral outrage over racial injustice to commit victimless crimes. And he'd said he'd gone clean, putting his life of dishonesty behind him for a fresh start. But now, eight months and more than a hundred interviews later, I know this: The cons were not virtuous – and there was seemingly no end to them.

Maverick Miles Nehemiah – or whichever of around 20 names he has gone by – is a prolific con artist. And his mark hasn't just been the government. His victims are real people: friends, colleagues, and the many women he dated. He has grafted elements of a four-decade-long illicit career – from car theft to romance scams and, yes, a minor forgery racket – into a Frankenstein's criminal, a Hollywood-esque master counterfeiter ennobled by the injustices of the state.

I'D BEEN TAKEN FOR A RIDE. I NEEDED TO START FROM THE BEGINNING – TO FIGURE OUT THE REAL STORY.

There was some truth to *The CONfidence Chronicles.* But it's a sliver of the larger picture. The real Maverick has targeted dozens if not hundreds of potential victims, from California to Copenhagen, leaving many of them traumatized or financially wrecked. When things get too hot, he retreats, pupates, and emerges again – with another identity, and another wild con. Each time he preys on our desire to seek simple, moral tales in a mangled, messed-up world.

I was no different. I bought into the myth of Maverick Miles, playing a role in his most outrageous plot to date – one that has reached all the way to Hollywood's rarified summit. But his journey began 40 years ago. Back then, he went by the name Derek. And he had gotten caught up in a very different kind of con.

KERRY ROSS (who requested her name be changed) was almost nine months pregnant, and her boyfriend was acting strange. It was January 1986, six years since she and Derek Andre Kelly met at Morgan State University in Baltimore. Derek, tall and buff, had arrived at MSU from Atlanta on a football scholarship. He was charming, with a deep, Southern drawl and a storyteller's lilt. He dreamed of having a movie made about his life. "You're gonna see me on the big screen," she remembers him telling her.

He seemed like a regular, if eccentric, guy, she tells me. "If he didn't have such psychopathic tendencies," she says, "he would be an amazing

Writer SEAN WILLIAMS *is co-host of "The Underworld Podcast" about organized crime.*

person." The couple stayed together after graduation, and in 1984 moved for a few months to Texas, where Derek tried out for the Houston Oilers. But he didn't make the roster. And Kerry grew tired of manipulative and erratic behavior, and lies that fishtailed from the banal to the bizarre. She remembers that he once checked into a hotel with a towel wrapped around his head, pretending to be a Middle Eastern sheik. Another evening, she says, he returned to their room with a scrap of paper, on which was written the name "Maverick Marsalis," a birth date and a Social Security number – Kerry couldn't figure why.

Kerry remembers visiting his family home in west Atlanta, where she met Derek's mother, Ann Elizabeth Kelly, and saw photos of his late father, Wade, who she was told was a commercial-airline pilot and had died in 1980. The home was just down the street from where, Derek liked to remind people, white residents erected a "Berlin Wall" in 1962 to keep out Black people.

Derek often ghosted Kerry, and she was sure there were other women. She says that as their relationship progressed, Derek's antics went from the deeply strange to disturbing. One year, Kerry says, he "borrowed" $2,500 from her, and never gave it back. It was her tuition for the semester. "That messed me up," she says. But she was scared that if she ever spoke out about his strange behavior that he'd make public the nude photos he'd taken of her.

(Maverick has since called my reporting "false" and "reckless." When sent a detailed list of fact-checking questions, he answered, "I can tell you that almost EVERYTHING of your questions IS WRONG." He then stalled getting on a call with ROLLING STONE's fact checker, and finally took more drastic measures. But more on that later.)

Derek had a second failed shot at the NFL – this time with the Indianapolis Colts – but by then he'd already fallen back on crime, and he would rack up a series of charges in the mid-Eighties. He told Kerry and another friend that he'd hooked up with a group in Houston importing European cars illegally. "They were some serious people," a longtime friend and accomplice I will call Leo tells me.

By 1985, Kerry and Derek lived separately. But around the time Kerry got pregnant, she remembers him dropping out of the crew, and moving to Atlanta. Kerry followed him there, hoping a child would convince him to settle down. But, she says, Derek showed up at her door just once during that time – to drop off a box of Pampers, and tell her he was probably going to prison. Kerry went to Maryland and gave birth alone – she remembers Derek telling her he had tried to board a plane to see her but the feds were up on the car-import scam. He told her they arrested him at the airport. A judge sentenced Derek in 1986 to five years' prison for the unauthorized use of a vehicle, according to court records. In Derek's telling to his girlfriend, the conviction was related to his illegal-import ring.

She never asked him for child support, and he claimed the boy wasn't his. "Derek said this baby's not his?" Kerry recalls Derek's mother asking her, incredulous, when they met soon after. But in a way – one that only really made sense in Derek's crazy, confusing world – he wasn't. Because by the next time Kerry heard from him, Derek was already well on his way to becoming somebody else.

* ARTISTIC REENACTMENT

N 1991, ATLANTA felt like the center of the universe. The Braves and Falcons were enjoying fairy-tale seasons, Atlanta-headquartered CNN's coverage of the Gulf War had made it a household name in news, and the city had just won the right to host the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Amanda Morgan hoped some of the city's stardust might rub off on her. (Remember the name Ann Morgan which Derek gave me early on? Her first name isn't Ann – but when I finally tracked her down she asked me to use a pseudonym to share her story.) She had moved to Georgia from Gary, Indiana, away from the father of her two-year-old son and her unfulfilling work. When a handsome, athletic local who called himself Kelly Marsalis answered a personal ad she'd placed in the alt-weekly *Creative Loafing*, Amanda tells me, "it was not love at first sight." But Kelly showed up in a Land Rover, and he was a smooth talker. And the fact that he neither drank nor took drugs was a relief – especially given Amanda's own struggles with alcohol. Amanda says it seemed weird when a cop friend told her that Kelly's real name was Derek – and that she never knew where he lived. She suspected he was hopping around the homes of other women. But he was fun.

After a couple of lunch dates, Amanda says, Kelly let her in on a secret: He had a mole at a credit bureau, and he was making bank forging payroll checks with a crew he sent out to cash them. Amanda says she had "mad computer skills," and he asked her, "Why don't you make me some IDs?" She balked. But soon afterward, her work dried up, and she says Kelly offered her $5,000 per ID. She made "several," she tells me.

In 1992, Amanda got a job at Midway Airlines, and relocated to Springfield, Illinois. Kelly visited for a couple of weeks, and brought with him a stack of counterfeit bonds big enough to fill a couple of shoeboxes. Kelly had sourced the paper and ink from underworld contacts, he said – but he needed somebody to cash them. "I'm quite arrogant," Amanda says. "I said, 'I'll do it.'"

Amanda tells it like this: First, she hit Chicago's Federal Reserve Bank as Kelly waited in the

GUTTER PHOTO CREDIT

* ARTISTIC REENACTMENT

lot outside. She emerged with almost 10 grand. It was addictive. Monday through Friday, Amanda worked her desk job at Midway, before flying to meet Kelly on weekends to walk paper in a city where he'd mapped out the banks. They'd often hit more than a dozen banks per day.

It wasn't their only scam. Amanda says Kelly sought out folks selling jewelry and watches, and paid them in person with phony documents – making sure to do so on evenings and weekends, so he'd be long gone before they could verify their authenticity. Amanda remembers traveling from Atlanta to sell a bunch of it to a Florida gold dealer. "He drove, I did the transaction," she tells me. "I wanna say, $25,000 to $30,000."

Then one weekend in 1993, Amanda says, she and Kelly pulled up beside a bank west of St. Louis. "Dude," Amanda warned, "this looks familiar." Kelly assured her they hadn't been before. But he was wrong. Amanda was dressed in a white Lillie Rubin suit – hardly a forgettable look in a suburban bank – and the teller recognized her. She says the manager told her to take a seat, went to his office, and picked up the phone. He still had her ID and the bonds.

"You know what?" Amanda remembers telling him. "I left my son in the car. Let me go out and I'll just grab him, and I'll be right back in."

She left the bank and jumped into Kelly's car. "Let's get outta here," she said.

Things unraveled soon after. In 1994, Amanda says, her family's Gary home was broken into and some of the fake bonds were stolen. Cops later found the bonds while searching another property and traced them back to Amanda. Late that year, Amanda was driving through Gary when an officer spotted her and chased her down. At first she refused to tell authorities who'd worked the scam with her. But after a few weeks, she tells me, "I got a court-appointed attorney who said, 'You better save your ass, honey, because you're looking at a lot of years in prison.'

"I was like, 'You know what? Fuck him,' " she says. "And I flipped."

Amanda received a three-year house-arrest sentence and a more than $50,000 fine for possessing counterfeit securities. And officials picked up Kelly in January of that same year in Texas, and charged him with possession of counterfeit bonds. But he wasn't staring at a 50-year term, as *The CONfidence Chronicles* claims. In July 1995, an L.A. jury found Derek Andri Kelly – a.k.a. Derek Kelly-Marsalis; a.k.a. Derek Andri Kelly Marsalis – guilty and sentenced him to 15 months in prison (including time served), three years of probation, and a $6,000 fine.

Derek emerged from prison in early 1996, as Atlanta prepared to host the Olympics. Both he and the city would soon require a reinvention. He could barely have timed his second act better. In the mid-Nineties, a new wave of websites like Craigslist, eBay, and Match.com connected folks from all corners of the globe – and skilled manipulators like Derek with millions of potential marks. Gone was the need to steal cars or walk phony bonds. Now, all he needed was a laptop and a modem.

SINCE DISCOVERING Derek's true identity I have reached out to well over 200 people, locating around 20 victims of romance scams alone – and I know of several dozen more potential victims I've yet to reach. We'll likely never know exactly how many people Derek has conned.

His playbook, according to women he courted, was simple but highly effective. He'd strike up a fiery digital relationship, pouring romantic grandiloquence over a backing track of jazz or funk. "I'm here to love you, I'm here to care about you," he purred in a voicemail message to one woman, soon after they'd met. "I need love from you. I need care from you. I need attention." Many connections remained digital. Others progressed to lunch or dinner, to which Derek invariably arrived in a Cadillac or Porsche, sometimes dressed in his signature suit and cowboy boots. "He's charming, and he knows how to speak to a woman," a Danish jazz singer tells me. Another woman, who tells me Derek sent her a photo of him supposedly at the Oscars, says he's "a renaissance man – and a brilliant man at that." These women say that soon after the initial wooing, there'd be an illness, tragedy, or business venture that required payment. When the woman obliged, sending over the money, Derek would usually disappear or let the relationship fizzle.

An acquaintance of Derek's tells me he wanted to connect her to someone named Carmen, with whom she could invest $250,000. "Then all of a sudden Carmen dies of Covid – right before we're supposed to have this meeting.

"Almost a year later ... he's telling me how he's just come back from visiting his friend Carmen, and I'm like, 'Really, the one who died last year?' " the acquaintance adds. "And the look on his face, right after he said the name Carmen: He knew, and he was hoping I wouldn't catch. And then, of course, I did, and he became a fucking raging asshole, all of a sudden – from suave, debonair, and charming to narcissistic asshole."

Derek often lived with one or even two women for months at a time, or traveled across state lines to meet girlfriends, according to several women who dated him. But he was controlling; "lying for no reason," one former partner tells me, "just being vindictive for the sake of it."

Derek told people he didn't have any kids. That was a lie, too. Around 2000, Derek – as Kelly – met a medical assistant living in the San Fernando Valley in California I'll call Rachel (she asked that her real name not be used). She says

he moved into her house, racking up huge phone bills, disappearing for days on end, and demanding money for side projects she never fully understood. Rachel got pregnant, but miscarried. Then she got pregnant again, and Derek asked her to get an abortion. Rachel refused, and Derek left during her first trimester.

Rachel filed for child support when their son was six months old. But to date, she says, she's received a total of $700 and lives on disability. Sometimes Rachel's now-19-year-old son shows her Derek's Instagram posts, studded with exotic cars and expensive clothes. "It makes us wonder," she tells me, "why could you not sell one of those cars and give us some money?

"My son says, 'Does he ever even ask about me?' " Rachel says. "And unfortunately, no, he doesn't. But I feel like I got the prince charming, and he's my kid. He's smart and crafty like his dad, but he's got my heart."

As years passed, the stories Derek spun about his life grew more elaborate and outlandish. At stages, Derek has claimed to be related to the jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis (Marsalis' family says they have no relatives by this name), and the ex-fiancé of a Brazilian woman killed in a car wreck (another fact I couldn't pin down). Derek's LinkedIn says he's studied at Harvard Business School, the University of Texas, and the American Film Institute – which I wasn't able to confirm. He told one former friend he'd built infrastructure for the Atlanta games with "two hammers in his hands ... the overtime at the Olympics – that's how he made his money." He told another he'd competed at the games. One of the few facts I could confirm was that, via his Colts tryout, Derek is an NFL alum.

Derek's family and upbringing were reimagined, too. In *The CONfidence Chronicles,* and in his telling to me, his modest childhood home in Atlanta became a 500-acre ranch between two lakes in Tulia, Texas. (Tulia's city librarian tells me 500 acres would be "huge," and that the only lake in the county dried up decades ago.) Wade Kelly is described as "the Colonel," an Air Force veteran who had served with the Tuskegee Airmen: Derek would later post an image of Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James Jr., America's first Black four-star general, to social media, claiming him to be Wade. His mom, Ann Elizabeth, became a pianist and Zia Pueblo Indian. Even to his old friends, Derek has changed his life story over and over. "I've heard him say [his mom died] about 30 times," his friend Leo tells me. "I'm like, 'Man, your mother ain't dying every month, every year' ... I'm like, 'What the fuck are you?' "

Throughout the early 2000s, Derek's romance scams and lies multiplied, fueled by a series of email accounts and dating profiles – oftentimes typing through the night and calling marks in the wee hours – out of an L.A. hangar he would later call, simply, "Base."

By 2000, it seemed like Derek hit the jackpot, having persuaded a California woman, Jan Slovis, to part with her life savings. But around that time, some of the women began to contact one another about their run-ins with Derek. And a private investigator Slovis talked to contacted Amanda Morgan, who was now traveling for her work as a consultant. "I'm sitting in hotel rooms every evening with nothing else to do, lemme just blog about this cat and put up a Yahoo! Group," Amanda says.

More than 50 women came forward. Amanda spoke to them all, usually more than once – and compiled their stories at a website called Info About D. Kelly Marsalis. (I would track Amanda down via an archived section of the site.) Most of the blog has been lost over time, but posts remain detailing bounced checks and credit-card fraud. Amanda says roughly 12 women told her they'd been scammed out of cash by Derek. And that two claimed he pressured them into having abortions.

"He's scammed every woman he's come into contact with," Amanda tells me. "Let's just put him out there as the internet's biggest con man." According to an old blog post, some of the women contacted the IRS, then the cops – but, they claimed, nobody was interested. Eventually, a producer at Fox 11 News in L.A. got wind of Derek's schemes. On Feb. 10, 2003, the station ran a feature warning viewers of the dangers of digital con artists, focusing on a victim of "Derek Kelly 'Big Daddy' Marsalis ... He was model-pretty, drove fast, expensive cars, and she found him so pretty."

There on the screen, alongside the names of victims, was Derek's face, clear as day. When a friend called Rachel to tell her, she cried, "Oh, my God. Kelly is on the news!"

"I thought he was gonna get screwed," she tells me. "But it didn't happen."

AFTER THAT 2003 Fox segment aired, Derek seemed to tone down the romance scams – though my research suggests he never gave them up altogether. Rather, he refocused his efforts on two other passions: cars and movies. He amassed a formidable collection of vehicles at his L.A. hangar – in particular Porsche 928s, a model he'd loved since his youth. He often modified them garishly and showed them at events across California under any one of a dozen-plus aliases. Rumors swirled on Porsche-owner forums that he'd gotten hold of cars through nefarious means. A British movie producer named Marcus Hutchinson claimed on an online forum that Derek took his Porsche 928 for a test-drive and never came back. Hutchinson even posted a mocked-up wanted poster to his website, with Derek's face on it. "This person is the thief that stole the car," it read, "one of the biggest CONMEN around." (Derek sued Hutchinson for defamation in 2009, and the case was dismissed.)

In 2007, Ann Elizabeth Kelly died. Around that time, a Porsche fan Derek had met at a show introduced him to a high-flying Hollywood insider I will call Harry Stoffer (he asked not to be named, as well). That summer, Harry visited Derek's auto shop, and marveled at its contents. "It was impressive," he tells me. "These Porsches and old cars, all looking real nice."

Harry loaned Derek $125,000 for his "exotic car business," with Derek promising to pay it back in monthly installments. Sensing a break in the movie business, Derek also handed Harry a script he'd written called *Tucson on Ice,* about a group of porn actresses who try to rip off a meth dealer, before being captured and tortured. The script's characters appeared to be composites of people from Derek's life – from a car thief named Marcos to a Native American gangster named Dalton Agoyo, whose surname matches that of a Pueblo woman Derek attempted to scam in real life (I wondered if she also may have been the inspiration for his mother's supposed heritage). It included a scene where one of the women is stripped, shaved, and, below her navel, tattooed:

"Beware the mount of Venus ... for it is an evil trap. Not only as a money box for your money but a pit of despair for your passions."

Derek had already dabbled in the entertainment industry by this point – but each time he got what looked like a break, he couldn't help but con those who'd given it to him. He'd produced soft-porn videos for *Penthouse* and other outlets but, according to accusations posted online, bilked on payments to actors. He founded a production company with two other guys, but they bailed after suspicious behavior that one of them says included Derek hiding his vehicles and changing their license plates. "That was a red flag," says one of the men, director Joseph Guidry. "Something's going on." Guidry and the third man dissolved the company soon after Derek hid from cops when an alarm tripped at their building. "I just had to evacuate myself," Guidry says, "leave that whole situation behind."

Another time, according to a rock musician I spoke with, a director paid Derek to shoot behind-the-scenes footage of a movie. But instead, Derek shot scenes directly over the director's shoulder, edited them, and claimed the movie was his. "The producers got really pissed off," the rock musician tells me. "This was a big deal. And he was like, 'No, I own the footage.' "

Derek vanished from the rock musician's life soon after, having failed to pay almost $2,000 in edit-suite fees at her production studio. He was a "bright guy," she recalls. "I really liked him. So when he skipped out it was like, 'Wow, really?' It really pissed me off."

In hindsight, even given Harry's status in the movie industry, it's not surprising that Derek scammed him, too. Harry says that when Derek made excuses for late payments, he got creative, snuck into Derek's L.A. hangar, and found an eviction notice from Derek's landlord – despite Derek's claims he owned the building. Harry then went up to the office Derek kept strictly off-limits. In one corner was a gigantic model railway, complete with scenery and stations. But that wasn't the weirdest thing. In a small jewelry box, there were fake IDs and passports – "alias stuff," Harry says. "I said, 'Wow – this guy is a freaking scam artist. What have I gotten myself into here?' "

Harry contacted the landlord, and the two men found they had similar tales of financial chicanery. "He kept giving me the runaround," the landlord tells me. "And he was lying in a way that kinda pisses you off – 'I'll be there in an hour,' 'I'm on the freeway.'... It was that over and over."

On Sept. 17, 2007, Harry filed a lawsuit against Derek, alleging breach of contract and fraud. Derek was evicted from the hangar, and leased another one across town. He filed for bankruptcy in 2012. Then, in October 2015, Derek reached out to Harry again, via an email with the subject "Coming Clean With You." "I have often suppressed the level of things that I did in my wild and crazy youth," wrote Derek. "I'm [*Cont. on 78*]

REAL STIHL. FIND YOURS.

From our factory in Virginia Beach to over 10,000 authorized local STIHL Dealers across the nation, a majority of our battery- and gas-powered tools are made and sold right here in America.*

STIHLUSA.COM

*Made in America of U.S. and global materials.

©2023 STIHL 23ST40FP1

Reviews

Music

MEXICAN AMERICAN POP'S '200%' MOMENT

Becky G and DannyLux bridge cultures and make history on two great new LPs

By JULYSSA LOPEZ

Becky G
Esquinas
Kemosabe/Sony Latin/RCA

DannyLux
DLux
Warner Latina

IT'S OFTEN the case that children of immigrants, especially Latino ones, learn to balance two cultures from a young age. Frequently, they navigate dual worlds, with one foot firmly planted in the place where they've grown up, the other fastened in their parents' homeland – resulting in what can feel like being split in half, caught between double the amount of traditions and customs and pop-culture references.

But lately, a younger generation has been recasting complex bicultural identities as the lucky inheritance of "200-percenters," kids who are proudly 100 percent Latino and 100 percent American. The description was on Becky G's mind when she began recording her latest album, *Esquinas,* a gorgeous exploration of what it means to be Mexican ➔

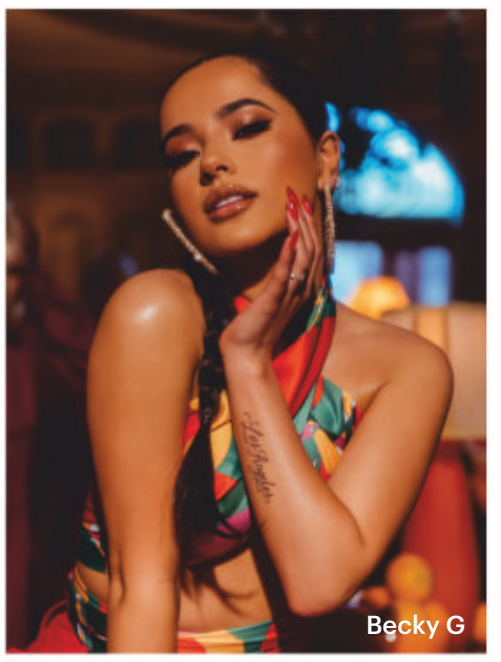
ILLUSTRATION BY
Carolina Rodríguez Fuenmayor

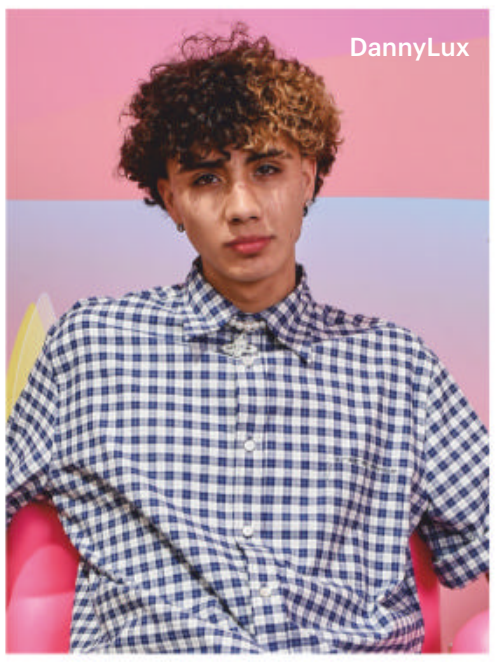
BECKY G AND DANNYLUX

American – and how it's shaped who she is as a pop star and as a person. The title, which means "corners," captures the intersection of two cultures. It's also an endearing nod to her upbringing in Inglewood, California, where she recalls shops and restaurants being "just at *la esquinita*" – "right at the corner."

But the album also represents a long artistic journey. Becky G, who got her start making pop in English, fully embraces the richness of Mexican genres, teaming up with producer Edgar Barrera for a profound examination of the music's significance to her and the generations that came before. It's a full-circle moment: She's become an elder stateswoman for a new movement of kids who have been taking Mexican sounds to new, global heights. In 2023, artists like Grupo Frontera, Peso Pluma, and Eslabon Armado have shot to Number One on Spotify's Global charts – Becky even brought out Pluma during her ode to Mexican heritage at Coachella.

On *Esquinas,* no song comes across derivative or pastiche. "2ndo Chance" is a ballad dipped in nostalgic synths that morphs into a brooding acoustic burner with Gen Z heartthrob Ivan Cornejo. Other collaborations include a stunning show of vocal acrobatics with Yahritza Y Su Esencia and a tender moment with ranchera royalty Angela Aguilar. But it's on "Querido Abuelo," a shattering tribute to her late grandfather, that she lays out the heart of this project: "I want you to know it's an honor to represent your bloodline."


Becky G



When Becky G was just an elementary school kid, living out the memories that are all over *Esquinas,* DannyLux was a baby, born in the Coachella Valley to parents from Mexicali, Mexico. His father drove garbage trucks for a company that actually used to clean the grounds of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival every year; on one of his daily routes around the area, he happened to find a guitar that he brought home and gave to Danny when he was about seven years old.

That was Danny's first guitar, the one with which he began unlocking the honeyed sound that's all over his latest album, *DLux*. It's his third full-length release since breaking out on TikTok as a sweet, sentimental player in the growing música Mexicana scene. It comes just after Danny played at Coachella, exactly where his father worked years ago, and while he's been making a name for himself as a rising star. (Coincidentally, he's also featured on Becky's new album.)

While most of Danny's previous projects have plunged into a full range of Mexican styles, *DLux* casts a wider net, letting Danny drift into Americana, bachata, bossa nova, and more. He teams up with Jordyn Shellhart, a satin-voiced vocalist from Nashville, for "La Lluvia," a gentle duet that highlights the long-standing connection between country and Mexican music. "Decir Adios," a woozy daydream with whimsical wunderkind Cuco, suggests there are experimental depths Danny wants to discover.

Still, the foundation of this record is the sad sierreños that Danny's so adept at writing. Though he grew up in California, his lyrics are in Spanish, and his verses are carefully observed and intensely felt. Like Becky, he shows that no matter what he's doing, he's pulling from deep-seated roots that continue to find unexpectedly beautiful new ways to bloom. ®

FROM LEFT: RCA RECORDS; RVIN RIVERA/GETTY IMAGES

WILCO MAKE THE CHANGE WE NEED

Cool, copacetic new producer Cate Le Bon helps one of America's greatest bands keep it fresh By WILL HERMES

JEFF TWEEDY writes so well about his own music-making, there sometimes seems little worth adding: See his bestselling books (the annotated playlist *World Within a Song: Music That Changed My Life and Life That Changed My Music* is due November) and his Starship Casual Substack (the post from July 4 on Paul Simon's "America" was especially good). But outside perspective can be useful – as *Cousin* proves. It's the first Wilco set since 2007 to use an outside producer, and it shows – in the best possible way.

The producer is Welsh singer-songwriter Cate Le Bon, who clicked with the band at Solid Festival, Wilco's biennial Massachusetts music-and-art kegger. She does weird well, because her oddball pop always feels rooted in the heart. Tweedy's a plainspoken dude whose avant-garde streak, despite rangy sidemen like Glenn Kotche and Nels Cline, has occasionally come off more aspirational than constitutional. So Le Bon and Tweedy are a good match, and maybe because we're all swimming in strangeness lately, even *Cousin*'s more abstract fusions feel utterly natural.

Wilco
Cousin
DPBM

CHARLES HARRIS

Le Bon's touch is understated. Given her wickedly Nico-esque 2019 cover of Wilco's "Company in My Back," one might wish her vocals were more prominent. But her musicianship shadows the curveball melodies and clipped watchmaker beats scattered through *Cousin* – a fairly sharp pivot from the flashback country-rock Americana of last year's excellent *Cruel Country,* more often conjuring angular Anglo post-punk and old-school Canterbury Scene prog-rock. "A Bowl and a Pudding" is a dubby Nick Drake fever dream; "Pittsburgh" suggests the Incredible String Band tripping in a steel mill.

But part of Wilco's magic is their mutability ("They can be anything," Le Bon noted admiringly), and how artfully it always cleaves to Tweedy's narrative voice, one of the most companionable in modern song, even when he's channeling flawed characters, which he frequently is. "I love to take my meds/Like my doctor said," he sings on "Levee," a sorta-kinda love song about a relationship that might or might not represent salvation. "Evicted" is an unusually celebratory song about owning your fuck-ups. "Ten Dead" adds his voice to a haunting recent run of mass-shooting meditations. And "Meant to Be," the set closer, is a feint that suggests a triumphal love song until you sense the singer's earnestness might be one-sided. When he sings the words "I still believe you're the only one" near the end, the key word hangs like the "Believe" sign above Ted Lasso's locker-room doorway. It's no assurance of anything, but it's a force – like Wilco's entire oeuvre, really – to keep us hopeful. ®

RollingStone GUIDE

Latin Rock

Sixty years of music – from psych rock to tropicália, from New Wave to grunge

By ERNESTO LECHNER

FOR GENERATIONS, young Latin American artists and listeners have been falling in love with new sounds arriving from England and the U.S. – whether it's Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, prog-rock, New Wave, or grunge. And they've mixed those influences with local styles and song formats, from Brazilian samba and Argentine balada to Colombian cumbia and Mexican bolero. Our guide to rock from Latin America starts in the 1960s and runs right up to the present, highlighting this cultural exchange at its most ambitious and transcendent.

Charly Garcia, Julieta Venegas, Milton Nascimento (from left)

Must-Haves

Café Tacvba, *Re*

1994

The second LP from Café Tacvba is a stylistic tour de force with the spirit of Mexico ingrained in every single one of its 20 tracks, from the chaotic norteño sendup of "La Ingrata" to the retro bolero candor of "Esa Noche." Since its release nearly 30 years ago, it has been compared repeatedly with the Beatles' White Album, and for good reason. The folkified psychedelic ska of "Las Flores," the avant-mambo of "El puñal y el corazón," and the smoky jazz miniature "El Balcón" showcase a band intoxicated with its own power to inspire and subvert.

Gustavo Cerati, *Bocanada*

1999

Cerati's second solo LP, following his time in the Argentine band Soda Stereo, is a declaration of freedom, a resplendent slice of South American noir. "Bocanada" turns a sample of Dutch proggers Focus into existential pathos, and "Verbo Carne" evokes the somber aftertaste of a Bond theme. "Everything is happening precisely here and now," Cerati murmurs on the ethereal "Aquí & Ahora." Twenty-four years later, it still is.

Aterciopelados, *La Pipa de la Paz*

1996

It begins with the gravitas of "Cosita Seria" and never lets up. The virtuoso vocalizing of self-professed *chica difícil* Andrea Echeverri soars as she downplays romantic love on the lilting joropo "La Culpable," then praises the healing vibrations of sound on "Música." Héctor Buitrago adds punky bass accents to the panoramic soundscapes of "Buena Estrella" and "Baracunatana." The finest band ever to emerge from Colombia released many superlative records; produced by Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera, this one comes on like a speeding freight train.

Milton Nascimento, *Clube da Esquina*

1972

At the core of this double LP lies Nascimento's childlike wonder in his fusion of Beatlesque nostalgia, Afro-Brazilian folk, and avant-garde quirks. Songs brim with potent images: the sun on your head as you ride a blue train on "O Trem Azul," a sunflower the color of her hair on the psychedelic "Um Girassol da Cor do Seu Cabelo," percussion-like bells — a taste of life and death. More than a concept album, *Clube da Esquina* feels like a religious experience.

Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, *Fabulosos Calavera*

1997

The commercial success of their 1994 song "Matador" — a mix of carnival beats and political lyrics — inspired Argentina's Fabulosos Cadillacs to throw record-label expectations to the wind and revel in experimentation. A vaguely conceptual LP populated by surfing skeletons, *diablitos,* and glowing skulls, *Fabulosos Calavera* employs the band's instrumental heft to zigzag restlessly from thrash metal to brassy funk, spaghetti Western, and sentimental balladry.

Os Mutantes, *Os Mutantes*

1968

In the late Sixties, a young generation of Brazilian musicians embraced psychedelia and decried the nation's military dictatorship. Their tropicália movement peaked with Os Mutante's debut. They hop around the map, cover French pop star Françoise Hardy, the Mamas and the Papas, and local hero Jorge Ben – but they also get introspective on haunting pearls like "O Relógio."

Further Listening

Babasónicos, *Jessico*

2001

Hailing from Buenos Aires, Babasónicos exuded too-cool glam attitude. But the band is

FROM LEFT: RICARDO CEPPI/GETTY IMAGES; M. CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE; DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

also nurtured by singer-songwriter Adrián Dárgelos' intimate understanding of Seventies balada – its preoccupation with gossamer melodies and a bohemian state of mind. They also know how to rock like Black Sabbath and deliver songs of breathtaking beauty, too.

Julieta Venegas, *Bueninvento*

2000

The Tijuana singer's second outing revealed her as a songwriting prodigy. A song cycle of unfathomable passion, *Bueninvento* is endearing in its vulnerability and eccentricity. It is also filled with memorable passages, like the mournful self-reflection of "Sería Feliz" and a gutsy cover of the Juan Gabriel gem "Siempre en Mi Mente."

Soda Stereo, *Canción Animal*

1990

Argentine trio Soda Stereo spent most of the Eighties displaying their synth-pop influences, but with *Canción Animal,* they cemented an anthemic guitar-based sound. "De Música Ligera" became a pan-Latin hit, and highlights like "Hombre al Agua" and "(En) El Séptimo Día" contribute to the album's self-assured combustion.

Caifanes, *El Silencio*

1992

Anchored on the wounded mystique of singer, guitarist, and songwriter Saúl Hernández, Caifanes contributed to a bold new era for Mexican rock with a near-gothic sound that achieved the right balance between hope and despair by knowing when to throw in the occasional ray of light. Produced by King Crimson alum Adrian Belew, *El Silencio* boasts classics like the majestic "Nubes."

Café Tacvba

Natalia Lafourcade, *Hasta la Raíz*

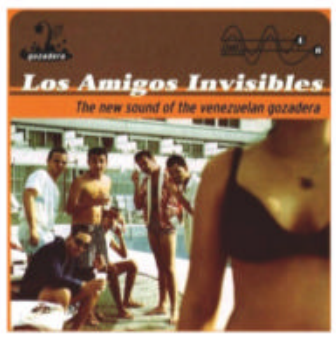
2015

Mexican singer Lafourcade's luminous sixth album infused Latin rock with a new sense of confidence. *Hasta la Raíz* feels like a whirlpool of sunny vibes, with just a touch of rainy afternoons for good measure (the jazzy breakup ballad "Lo Que Construimos"). Throughout the LP, her voice is crystal clear, angelic, and always in command.

Santana, *Abraxas*

1970

Born in Jalisco, Mexico, Carlos Santana moved to San Francisco as a teen and soon became *the* Latin-rock architect. He felt equally comfortable playing the blues, jazz fusion, or a Tito Puente standard. Recorded with his band Santana, the million-selling *Abraxas* embedded Carlos' abrasive guitar licks on an authentic Afro-Caribbean section.



Los Amigos Invisibles, *The New Sound of the Venezuelan Gozadera*

1998

The Venezuelan sextet's live gigs of the late Nineties became legendary for their Dionysian blend of disco, mambo, and decadent ultra-funk. Their second album distilled that energy, whether on the silky bossa of "Las Lycras del Ávila" or the lounge-flavored "Mango Cool."

Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio, *El Circo*

1991

Casting an adoring gaze on Chicano culture, the black-and-white movies of Tin Tan ("El rey del barrio"), and the vintage glamour of Mexico City's tropical ballrooms, Maldita Vecindad celebrated the past with congas and sax riffs — but also amped up the mosh pit with their uncompromising blend of ska, reggae, and punk. *El Circo* is an album that overflows with unexpected pleasures.

Going Deeper

Sumo, *Llegando los Monos*

1986

Determined to quit drugs, Italian singer Luca Prodan moved to Argentina in 1980 because heroin wasn't available there. He would find refuge in alcohol and die in 1987 at 34. But in those seven years, Prodan reinvented Latin rock with his peculiar European accent and Sumo's eccentric mosaic of influences: virulent post-punk, bouncy reggae, menacing prog-pomp, and Joy Division-style darkness.

Karnak, *Karnak*

1995

Inspired by the field recordings that he amassed during his travels around the world, singer and multi-instrumentalist André Abujamra returned to his native São Paulo and spent three years crafting Latin music's most criminally underrated album: a sprawling, cosmopolitan, immensely poignant debut. "I'm not from this world/I came from Atlantis," he states on the infectious "Comendo Uva Na Chuva" — a sample of his otherworldly vision.

Pescado Rabioso, *Artaud*

1973

The 1969 debut by Luis Alberto Spinetta's band Almendra was a milestone for Argentine rock. The sessions he recorded three years later with experimental outfit Pescado Rabioso went deeper, delving into surrealism for an album that is essentially a solo effort, informed by acid rock, swaying acoustic guitars, and thorny jazz harmonics.

Charly García, *Clics Modernos*

1983

Recorded as Argentina returned to democracy after years of censorship, Garcia's second solo album chronicled the full transition of rock *en español* into angular New Wave. An exhilarating session, it mostly forsakes live percussion in favor of an 808 drum machine. García shows off his keyboard pyrotechnics while celebrating the end of tyranny.

Roberto Carlos, *Roberto Carlos em Ritmo de Aventura*

1967

Long before he became a million-selling Latin crooner, Roberto Carlos was a rock & roller. From the raw charm of soul-rock smash "Eu Sou Terrível" to the wistful "Como É Grande O Meu Amor Por Você," this soundtrack LP was one of the first albums that showcased the boundless potential of Brazilian rock.

BILL TOMPKINS/GETTY IMAGES

ONE GREAT ROCK MOVIE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Twenty years after 'School of Rock,' the filmmakers and cast remember making the hilarious 2003 comedy with a heart of gold

By ANGIE MARTOCCIO

IT WAS 20 YEARS AGO this month that Jack Black put on a bow tie, walked into a prep school, and told a bunch of fourth graders to get the Led out. His star turn as the lovable loser in Richard Linklater's *School of Rock* helped the film gross nearly $20 million when it opened, breaking the record for music-themed comedies at the time. Over the years, it's inspired a hit Broadway musical, a TV show, and a children's book, and helped popularize actual School of Rock programs for kids who want to serve society by rocking. Two decades on, it remains a wildly funny movie with honest-to-God great tunes – and its kind, inclusive spirit has aged much better than most 2000s comedies. Here's the story of *School of Rock*, as told through 30 new interviews with Black, Linklater, Sarah Silverman, Miranda Cosgrove, Maryam Hassan, and others.

I. THE ORIGINAL SCHOOL OF ROCK

IN 1975, a 27-year-old Canadian musician got a job teaching at an elementary school in rural British Columbia.

Hans Fenger (The Langley Schools Music Project): I became a teacher purely by accident. I had no clue what I was doing, and I never wanted to be a teacher, but life got in the way. My girlfriend got pregnant. I needed a job. I showed up there with hair all over the place.

Teaching afternoon classes with very little supervision, Fenger showed his students how to play songs by David Bowie and Fleetwood Mac.

Fenger: Kids' music is so "I want to teach the world to sing in harmony! Peace in the world! My pets are really nice!" Meanwhile, kids didn't feel that. They felt lonely. They felt sad. Many of them came from bad backgrounds. The purpose of music is to express an emotion, but there was no music for six-year-olds to do that.

In 1976, Fenger spontaneously brought the kids into the gymnasium and recorded them with his friend's Revox tape recorder. The album they made, Innocence & Despair, *was quickly forgotten and ignored for decades – until a 2001 repressing on CD made it a cult classic, and grabbed the attention of a young screenwriter named Mike White.*

II. THE SCREENPLAY

WHITE USED Fenger's story as the inspiration for a screenplay about a down-on-his-luck rock singer who poses as a substitute teacher at a prep school – and forms a band with his students.

Jack Black (Dewey Finn): Mike White was my neighbor. He just made me laugh so much. I was always fascinated by his strange magic.

White wrote a part for Black in 2002's Orange County, *in which the actor played Colin Hanks' stoner brother. Then White got the idea to write a movie with Black as the star.*

Black: Part was written for me, didn't have to audish. The truth is, once *High Fidelity* came out in theaters, I didn't even need headshots anymore.

Producer Scott Rudin, who'd worked with White on Orange County, *wanted Austin-based director Richard Linklater for their next project.*

Richard Linklater (Director): This script shows up. I read it and passed. It was cheesy; there was a formulaic quality to it. Then I got a call from my agent. She's like, "Rudin is not accepting your pass."

Black: I loved Richard Linklater because I loved *Slackers*, and I thought *Dazed and Confused* was brilliant. Obviously, he knew

PLAY THE SONG, SCHNEEBLY
From left: Linklater on set with Falduto; Black delivers a lesson; the kids in the cast line up for a costume test.

rock. I was nervous, though, because it seemed like all of his movies were kind of low-budge indie experiments. This has potential to be a big summer hit.

Black, Linklater, and White all met up at the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles to discuss the script.

Black: I don't think that Mike White and Richard Linklater ever would've gotten together to collaborate had it not been for Scott Rudin, because they're very different temperaments. They're a little bit like oil and water. They didn't always totally get along.

Linklater's main concern was that the story White had written was unrealistic.

Black: He was like, "I don't believe this. They're doing a music class and nobody finds out? They have to soundproof the classroom."

Sam Hoffman (First Assistant Director): There were a lot of elements that were pushing it in a very theatrical direction. Rick's Texan take on it was to make it more real.

Linklater: It was, as Jack would say, ridonculous that you could get away with this. I want there to be a logic within the world that makes sense. Still, if you really break it down, that wouldn't be enough sound insulation to keep the room next door from knowing you got a full rock & roll band going in here. But at least we're letting everyone know, "We thought about that."

III. CASTING

IN KEEPING WITH his usual style, Linklater steered away from casting professional Hollywood kids.

Black: It's Linklater. He's gifted, famously, at picking people to be in his movies, starting with *Dazed and Confused*. Look at that cast – every other person is a huge star now. It was all their first movies, and he saw their potential. And with this one, it was really important. None of them felt like child actors that are trying to make it with their stage moms.

Hoffman: One of the amazing things that Rick did was cast kids who could play and sing.

Ilene Starger (Casting Director): We wanted as much reality as possible. No one would be dubbed or would be pretending to play an instrument.

Rogier Stoffers (Cinematographer): You do a Hollywood movie and the studio goes, "Oh, we have this cute kid in this Disney show." And then Rick's like, "Well, can she play the guitar?"

Joey Gaydos Jr. had attended a music camp in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His parents got an email inviting him to audition for a film in Chicago.

Joey Gaydos Jr. (Zack): My dad was a musician, and I was in the baby gate trying to listen in on rehearsal. I wanted to play as soon as I could. I had to let my hands grow before I could actually physically play guitar, but if I could have started earlier, I would have.

Others ended up winging it.

Cole Hawkins (Leonard): The only thing that they had taught us to play in a New York City public school was a recorder, so I faked it.

Angelo Massagli (Frankie): They asked me to sing. I just started belting "Crazy Train" by Ozzy, which is the only song I knew the words to.

Rivkah Reyes (Katie on bass) and Robert Tsai (Lawrence on keyboards) were scouted after appearing on the radio show From the Top, *which features classically trained children.*

Rivkah Reyes (Katie): My mom got me all these hair accoutrements from Limited Too, and I had this electric Daisy Rock guitar that my uncle had bought me. I did indeed rock out, and then two days later, I got the job. The cool part was that they had not written my character yet.

Maryam Hassan (Tomika): They allowed us to be the kids that auditioned for the movie. Of course, it may not have been our story fully, but the personality, that was us.

Caitlin Hale (Marta): I don't feel like I was acting. I was very sassy. A lot of what you saw was just me being me.

Gaydos Jr.: A hundred percent. Only when I had to act so bummed out in the movie a lot – that was the greatest extent of my acting. Inside, I was having the best time.

"This script shows up. I read it and passed. Then I got a call from my agent: '[Scott] Rudin is not accepting your pass.'"

– DIRECTOR RICHARD LINKLATER

Brian Falduto (Billy): They were very much creating the script while casting. I was supposed to be this nerd who's really into all the technical aspects, but then I ended up being a fashion designer.

Linklater: I remember Rudin liking the idea of having one of the kids be effeminate. I was like, "That's pretty radical." Even casting Brian and talking to his parents, I was like, "I don't know if you guys know yet, but young Brian is gay." They were cool with it.

Stoffers: [Linklater] was like, "I'm not going to make some kid play gay. You have to find it, otherwise we find somebody else." I think that's one of the biggest secrets of how it worked.

Several actors auditioned for the role of Summer, originally written as an aspiring singer with blond hair.

Hale: I auditioned to be Summer. I remember there being a lot of us.

Jordan-Claire Green (Michelle): Initially, in the first draft of the script, her character was completely different. She was a pop-star type, a young Britney Spears.

But an eight-year-old brunette won Linklater over.

Miranda Cosgrove (Summer): I had done the pilot for *Drake & Josh,* which is really the first thing I'd ever done. I wasn't sure if it was picked up yet, and then I found out that I got *School of Rock*.

Linklater: She was a year younger than everybody else, almost too young. But I just loved her delivery and her mannerisms.

Starger: Summer was written as a blond girl, a teacher's favorite, a gold-star-obsessed girl with utter determination, smarts, and leadership abilities. Miranda has dark hair, but she was perfect.

Cosgrove: I was definitely an overachiever type. I tried really hard in school, and I definitely cared about grades. They ended up making Summer the character I ended up playing, and then they split it into another role with Tomika, who's a really good

ABOUT TO ROCK
From near left: White and Silverman; Afflerbach, Green, and Infante have some fun behind the scenes; Joan Cusack.

THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: © PARAMOUNT PICTURES; © PARAMOUNT PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION; JOSEPH LA CORTE; © PARAMOUNT PICTURES/ALAMY; COURTESY OF BRIAN FALDUTO; © PARAMOUNT PICTURES

singer, and they made me the band manager.

Black: When I first met her, I was like, "Are you sure she should be the manager? She seems a little shy." Linklater was like, "Nah. She's got something that's very special." He called it.

Hassan, who had never acted before, was the last to get cast.

Starger: Tomika was written as having a great voice, yet she didn't want to be in the spotlight. We had seen many, many young girls for this role, but no one seemed quite right for it. The film's start date was approaching, but we were not going to settle. We had an open call on a Saturday in NYC, and I was worried. Then, near the end of that open call, Maryam came in with her mother. Her voice just floored us.

Linklater: We were having trouble finding someone who could really belt, and she just stepped up out of nowhere. I was like, "Oh, my God."

Joan Cusack was cast as the school's principal, and White played Ned Schneebly, the actual substitute teacher impersonated by Black's character. Sarah Silverman played Schneebly's girlfriend.

Sarah Silverman (Patty Di Marco): I always find Jewish and Italian very interchangeable. I was just so excited to be in a movie with Jack. He's the menschiest person.

Black: Sarah Silverman was from that world of *Mr. Show* and alt-comedy of the Nineties. So her brand of humor is like, she'll shock you with the things that she says. This role was way more of a straight character and a villainess.

Silverman: That was a time where women who were comics didn't really get to be funny in movies. They just were the ones going, "When are you going to get a job?" She's cunty and angry. But wouldn't you be if you lived with your boyfriend and his buddy took up the whole living room and never paid rent and was a dick to you and you couldn't even bring it up without being made into an asshole?

> **"I don't feel like I was acting. I was very sassy. A lot of what you saw was just me being me."**
>
> — CAITLIN HALE (MARTA)

IV. FILMING

SHOOTING BEGAN on Dec. 2, 2002. At first, Black was nervous about working with kids.

Black: In retrospect, it seems ridiculous because I'm such an immature idiot that it was a perfect match to be with a bunch of kids. We had a blast – horsing around and making jokes and making fart noises in between takes.

Green: The only time I ever saw him get nervous was one night we were on set, and he said a cuss word. I think it was "shit." He apologized to our parents. My mom was like, "You don't think she's ever heard me say 'shit'?"

One week in, Linklater had to replace one of the kids.

Linklater: I shouldn't even be saying all this publicly.... It was in rehearsals. There was a kid who wasn't with the program, so there were tough decisions to be made. I think he wanted a bigger part.

Hale: I don't want to shit on anybody, but he was unprofessional.

Veronica Afflerbach (Eleni): The kid was counting lines and creating a culture of competition.

Reyes: He was giving know-it-all energy. It's so cheesy that I'm about to quote it, but we were serving society by rocking, and there was no room for ego in that.

Linklater: I always tell people: "Hey, don't fuck with me, I fired a kid on *School of Rock*."

James Hosey, a redhead from Larchmont, New York, replaced the fired actor.

James Hosey (Marco): They chose the best possible replacement on Earth, I think.

V. THE MUSIC

LINKLATER WANTED to make sure School of Rock *was a legit rock & roll movie, so music supervisor Randall Poster brought in Sonic Youth's Jim O'Rourke. He started the kids off with simple songs, like "Sweet Jane."*

Jim O'Rourke (Music Consultant): I would go on set any time they shot a music scene to see if they've made a mistake. We were working at the Sonic Youth studio.

Gaydos Jr.: Jim was of an experimental, eclectic New York cool scene that I had no idea about at the time. Those are the memories I think about: being in his apartment and looking at his records, or his roaches in the ashtray.

O'Rourke: It wasn't a roach. I was smoking rolling-tobacco cigarettes.

The character of Summer was not a great singer, but Cosgrove was. O'Rourke had to teach her how to mangle an off-key "Memories" from Cats.

Cosgrove: They had me take a bad-singing lesson. I think I did two or three of them to get it right. It's so funny: I was probably trying really hard to sing terribly, which makes no sense.

O'Rourke: I was probably imitating goats. And Bob Dylan.

Cosgrove: I feel like most people have never taken a bad-singing lesson, but I highly recommend it.

In the early Nineties, Linklater had unsuccessfully attempted to get the rights to use a Led Zeppelin song in Dazed and Confused. *Ten years later, when they shot the Battle of the Bands scene, he tried again.*

Linklater: I remember being so sad about that. I was like, "OK, there's got to be something we can do." I pulled Jack aside and said, "We've got to get their attention. I think it'll be harder for them to say no to you."

Black: At the end of a shooting day, he said, "I want to do a thing where you beg Led Zeppelin to let us use 'Immigrant Song,' and just use the

STICK IT TO THE MAN
From left: Cosgrove; costume shots of Clark, Aleisha Allen, and Hassan (clockwise from left); Gaydos and Clark, with Black on drums.

THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: © PARAMOUNT PICTURES/ALAMY; JOSEPH LA CORTE, 3; © PARAMOUNT PICTURES; © PARAMOUNT PICTURES/ALAMY; COURTESY OF BRIAN FALDUTO

crowd and get them to chant along with you." So I said, "Led Zeppelin, lords of rock," and had the audience repeat after me.

Linklater: In very short order, our pitch was, "There's a new generation of kids being churned out every decade-plus, and some of them haven't heard of Led Zeppelin. Maybe it's cool for this rock & roll movie to feature you so prominently."

Black: He sent that over to them, and by God, it worked.

VI. THE PREMIERE

SCHOOL OF ROCK *was released on Oct. 3, 2003. Most of the cast didn't realize how big the film was until it hit theaters.*

Massagli: There was a premiere in L.A. We're at the afterparty at this club. I don't know how we all got in there. Me and Joey walked up to the bar, like, "Can we get a Coke?" And then I remember hearing someone go, "Put some Jack in that Coke."

And me and Joey look to our right, and there was Kid Rock and Sheryl Crow. And then you turn around and it's the Osbournes and the *Jackass* guys in all their glory. It was just surreal.

Green: All these celebrities were excited to meet us at these red-carpet events. I remember going to the MTV Awards, and Brittany Murphy was getting out of her car at the same time. She came over to us and was like, "Oh, my God! I'm so excited to meet you guys!" And I was like, "What is happening?"

VII. THE LEGACY

TWENTY YEARS LATER, School of Rock *is revered as a classic music comedy, with themes of diversity and inclusivity that were way ahead of its time.*

Reyes: It just warms my heart that it's aged so gracefully and that it still has this powerful message of radical self-acceptance. *School of Rock* allowed us to really let our freak flags fly. When you have a whole room full of underdogs, it's so powerful.

Z Infante (Gordon): I felt this connection with other queer members of the cast – Brian, Riv, and I were like magnets. I didn't know I was queer at the time, but there's something queer about *School of Rock*. There's something about challenging the status quo, about sticking it to the man, that creates this incredible environment for people of all backgrounds, sexual orientation, gender identities, races, religions. Whoever you are, you're welcome at the School of Rock.

Falduto: When I did finally come out and I started sharing my story, I got all these messages from guys who are my age who saw me onscreen when I was younger, and they were like, "You were exactly what I needed to see. Thank you so much."

Hassan also gets messages from fans about the scene in the movie where Mr. S gives a pep talk to Tomika about body positivity.

Hassan: Over the pandemic, my phone was nonstop. I'd get DMs from people who were around nine or 10 when they saw it, like, "That helped me so much," or they'll show it to their kids who are in the same situation. Now more than ever, with body positivity being a huge conversation, I'm so honored that I was a part of that scene. Because I was a plus-size kid, and I'm a plus-size woman now, and I'm confident.

The cast of School of Rock *never stopped being friends. They have a long-standing group text titled Schnayblay, and they're planning on celebrating the film's 20th anniversary this fall. Most importantly, they want to honor castmate Kevin Clark (Freddy the drummer), who died in a 2021 accident.*

Infante: Kevin is a central piece. We are still mourning. Something's missing.

Reyes: It was heartbreaking. Kevin was my brother. He was my best friend on set from day one. We both bonded over being Jewish and Chicagoan and liking Green Day. In his last few years, he had been teaching at a School of Rock.

Falduto: I'm getting emotional. There's only 14 other people who've had that experience with me for 20 years now. And to lose someone like that just felt like I lost a part of my family.

Reyes: Joey and I play together in a band. He and I always get to the rehearsal space a little early just so [we] can be in the room with the drum set. And the snare drums would just rattle every once in a while, and we'd be like, "He's here."

Gaydos Jr.: I feel him at all times. I wish he could be here. You just feel like he wasn't done yet, and that's the hardest part. Too young.

VIII. ENCORE

FOR BLACK, School of Rock *is a career highlight.*

Black: That's the one that's nearest and dearest to my heart, because it was so much a part of me – that character with the love of rock and not really fitting in the world of rock. It does mirror my experience with the entertainment industry. It felt like the planets aligned and I got to do the movie that I was born to do. It didn't really matter if I did anything else after that. I can just chill and relax now, because I did it.

But not so much for the guy who inspired it all.

Fenger (The Langley Schools Music Project): When *School of Rock* came out, I got tons of mail and phone calls from people who said, "Hey, you should see this movie. It's about you. Did you get paid?" It was a beautiful movie, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't what I did. I would've loved to have been in a position where I could teach kids AC/DC riffs, but that wasn't me. And I'm still poor.

"I was like, 'Are you sure she should be the manager? She seems a little shy.' Linklater was like, 'Nah. She's special.'"

– JACK BLACK ON MIRANDA COSGROVE

REUNION TOUR
From near left: Clark, who died in 2021, remains in his castmates' memory; Green, Falduto, and Infante share a toast at a recent event.

ANTI-FLAG

[*Cont. from 27*] STONE also reviewed the message Weller's friend sent, alerting her to the podcast.)

"I'm still unpacking my sexuality and what was affected by him by this relationship," Weller explains. "I remember that he instructed me to moan to show him 'that I was enjoying it.' It's so uncomfortable even to talk about now [and how that has shaped] my sexual life still."

Speaking to the women who claim to have been abused by Geever, many describe feeling isolated in their experiences and trying to reconcile his public persona with his private actions. Each felt they could be the only one. "He comes off as such a kind, loving, supportive, good person," Elizabeth says. "It's like Jekyll and Hyde."

Many of the women who spoke for this article expressed disappointment – if not outright fury – at Geever's statement. "He made me really angry when I read it," Stefanie says. "Especially for someone who preaches [what he does]. He's wearing his feminism shirts and then putting out a statement like that. It's just kind of insulting to everyone."

Geever's claim that no one had ever informed him his behavior was violating is a flat-out lie, Mat and Karina allege. Karina claims she confronted Geever in 1999, alleging that he took advantage of her inexperience through manipulation and pressure, and the lasting damage it caused. Geever allegedly "demonstrated sympathy," she says, and made it "seem like he wanted to do better." Mat says that after listening to Sarhadi on the podcast, she sent Geever a long message, which ROLLING STONE reviewed, detailing how using her for sex and easily discarding her had left her questioning her self-worth. He never responded. Two days later, he posted his statement.

The women, alongside some of the band's fans, also chastised the other band members for failing to take an immediate hard stance against Geever publicly or even acknowledge the blind eye they may have turned, as three women claim some of the members were present when Geever brought them on tour, backstage, or on the tour bus as teenagers and young women. "They knew how young everybody was," Rebecca, who dated a then-25-year-old Geever as a 17-year-old in the late 1990s, claims. "There was a clear boundary that he kept crossing over and over that should have raised flags for everybody."

In a joint statement to ROLLING STONE, the other Anti-Flag members say their trust has "wholly been broken" and are "disturbed by the efforts taken to conceal information from us." "We trusted everyone associated with the band to maintain a safe and respectful environment," they add. "The understanding that abusers can be anywhere further reinforces the importance of survivors speaking out and sharing their stories.... Further, we feel strongly that all predators must atone for their inappropriate actions and be held accountable."

The accusations and blatant contradiction of Anti-Flag's core tenets – proceeds from the compilation album featuring "Feminism Is for Everybody" went to Protect, a nonprofit aimed at combating child abuse and exploitation – have already caused several bands to walk away from Anti-Flag's label, A-F Records. Artist Sammy Kay, who signed to the label earlier this year, felt the allegation and the band's lack of transparency left him no choice but to leave. How could he stay "if what they're preaching onstage and spreading to the world does not align with what [their] day to day is," Kay says. (The band confirmed to ROLLING STONE that they are "in the process of unwinding the label, including returning master rights and physical records/merchandise to the bands, which will take some time to complete properly.")

Multiple accusers tell ROLLING STONE that there's no single path forward for accountability and rectifying the damage they say Geever has caused over the years. Disbanding isn't enough, Mat says. Neither is Geever and the band's statement. "It is important that everyone knows the truth," she says. "For everyone to know that you are a monster. My father had 15 T-shirts of Anti-Flag. When we talked, I told him, 'I don't want to see you wear something by them.' He just put everything in the trash. I want everyone to act that way."

Some believe Geever should face the criminal-justice system. Stark says despite police not moving forward with her case, she is still glad she filed the report. "It wasn't for nothing," Stark says. "My statement stays in the [police] system forever because of the nature of the accusation. So if another person from the U.K. did ever come forward, my statement is there for corroboration."

Others are focused on healing and bringing more awareness to the wider punk community about power imbalances and how alleged abusers can thrive in plain sight. "Nobody wants this situation where people are getting out the pitchforks," Karina says. "What they want is healing and to feel like somebody is being accountable, and someone can hold our pain."

Many urge Geever to seek help. "The compassionate part of me recognizes that there is some sickness or some trauma," Weller says. "I like to think that we're looking forward to a time when Justin at least is not going to hurt other people in the same ways and at best is going to get the help he needs to ultimately come to peace with himself."

The one glimmer of hope throughout has been the outpouring of support the women have described receiving from the punk-rock scene. It's been reaffirming that the family and community they craved and sought out were still there for them, despite the alleged actions of a musician whose band they formed around.

Weller says that after hearing Sarhadi's podcast, she processed her shock with a counselor. "When I was done spitting out words, my counselor had this really great smile and was like, 'Your life just started,' in such a knowing way," Weller says. "I feel like that's true. There's something in all this that's so liberating to know I'm not alone."

Speaking with others has been therapeutic for the women, including Sarhadi, who has launched ThePunkRockTherapist.org, a place where Geever's accusers and other survivors within the music industry can connect and receive free therapy sessions.

In April, Geever himself encouraged people to open up about connecting with others going through a traumatic event. "When you put out to people that you've gone through something horrible, what you find is [that] you aren't alone," he said. "There's so many other people who've gone through something similar. When you start to connect with them and talk with them, that's when the healing can actually begin."

The irony is not lost on Sarhadi. "[It's] another perfect example of him saying the right thing and it being a total scam," she says. "Maybe we were inspired originally by someone with a microphone. But we're the ones doing the work every day. We know we have each other's back."

THE PASSION OF JULIA FOX

[*Cont. from 57*] for instance, to have Julia trash Sandler's apartment during their breakup scene). The success of the movie not only catapulted her to mainstream fame virtually overnight, but brought her something she had rarely experienced before: acclaim for something other than her looks. "Having that was so validating," she says.

But the success of *Uncut Gems* was something of a double-edged sword. Its release coincided with the overdose death of her friend Gianna; in *Down the Drain,* Fox writes of sniffing oxy with her right before shooting a love scene with Sandler. Now, Fox was in the position of having to grieve her while promoting the film. "Everyone was talking to me about this one thing, but there's this glaring other thing in my brain," she recalls. "In a way, maybe it was a blessing. Because if I hadn't been able to have the distraction of having to show up and do that, then I would have probably gone off the deep end."

Prior to Gianna's death, Fox had gone on the anti-addiction drug Suboxone, and had tried to persuade Gianna to go on it as well. She has been open about being in recovery: "I do want to talk about the Suboxone, and I do want to raise awareness, because I feel there's a stigma around these maintenance drugs, but they really do fucking save lives," she says.

But this openness has been used against her. Last year, Azealia Banks attacked her on Instagram for her history of drug use, referring to her son as a "crackbaby." "If people want to harp on that, it's like, 'OK, you're part of the reason why people don't get treatment,' " Fox says. "So if I have to be a pioneer for that, then sure, whatever."

In *Down the Drain,* Fox writes that West accused her of hiding her history of drug use from him, with West claiming he had only found out about it when his ex, Kim Kardashian, told him. (Fox has never directly spoken to Kardashian, but says she was "a fan of hers" before dating West: "It was interesting to get a bird's-eye view into that situation," she says of witnessing the end of their relationship.)

Those who followed the breathless recounting of Fox and West's short-lived courtship in the tabloids will be pleased to know that there is, indeed, a section about the relationship with the rapper, whom she refers to in *Down the Drain* as "the artist." Fox was hesitant to write about him, knowing that "everyone's gonna focus on it. But I felt like I had to mention it. It was such a pivotal moment for me."

In *Down the Drain,* Fox paints an unflinching portrait of her whirlwind relationship with West, meeting him in Miami on New Year's Eve and getting scuttled from hotel room to hotel room for public outings, with him approving her wardrobe and criticizing her body to the point of offering her a boob job. She describes the relationship as completely chaste, playing Uno and dictionary games on their first date and only getting physical when the cameras were on. "It wasn't [sexual] at all," she says. (Of West's anti-Semitism, Fox, who is not Jewish, says she saw none of that during their time together, and that he primarily talked about his creative projects and his issues with Kardashian. "It caught me by surprise as much as everyone else," she says. "It just felt like religious psychosis or something.")

She says that at the time, she was largely motivated by anger at her ex for what she perceived as his lack of involvement and support for her and Valentino, blasting him on Instagram for being a "dead-

beat dad" (she says they are on better terms now), and she says West had similar intentions. "I think it kind of warped into weaponizing me to get back at his ex-wife. That's why the relationship only lasted a month," she says. The infamous *Interview Magazine* article about their date, she alleges in *Down the Drain,* was largely fictional and written at his team's behest. That was the first "red flag," she says. "When I realized what was happening, I was like, 'I don't want to be part of this.' "

When discussing the benefits of the relationship on her career, and the opportunities that exposure afforded her, Fox is clear-eyed: "I made a lot of money. That was great," she says. But Andalore, who styled Fox during that period and continued to work for West for a short time after the breakup, characterizes it as "demonic and scary" for Fox, saying it caused her "emotional distress." Fox also struggled with articles painting her as a starfucker and a gold digger, as well as the example it would set for her son. "If I wasn't a mom, I probably would have stuck it out longer," she says. "If I was still that version of myself, I would have probably just been like, 'It's a good opportunity, just do it.' Now that I'm a mom, I have a higher moral standard for myself."

Motherhood, says Andalore, is Fox's guiding principle: "The number-one thing that she is is a mom. That's the only thing that's really important to her at the end of the day. All the other stuff doesn't matter." Fox and Valentino live with Shazam and Shazam's boyfriend in an uptown railroad apartment, a dynamic Fox describes as "like that movie *Three Men and a Baby,* but it's girls and gays and theys."

Every day, she drops Valentino off at day care, cooks him dinner, and falls asleep in bed with him watching *The Magic School Bus* or *Go, Dog, Go!*. "I've always felt Julia has always been a mom figure," says Shazam. "[And] Valentino is her biggest priority." Occasionally, they'll go to Tompkins Square Park or hang out with Fox's other celeb-mom friend Emily Ratajkowski, but other than the two days a week Valentino spends with Fox's ex, she largely parents by herself.

"I always knew I was going to be a single mom. I manifested that for myself," she says. "Just because I've learned over time that men fuck everything up."

Finding a traditional type of co-parent is not something Fox is particularly interested in. She is on Raya, but rarely uses it: "I'm like, where are the celebrities? It's all investment-finance bros at this point." Having had to use sex as currency for much of her life, she says she is, and mostly always has been, largely uninterested in sex. "The cons outweigh the pros – like, having to get that close to somebody, letting someone in your space, and all the things that come with that," she says. "My experience has been that sex either ruins everything, or complicates everything. And I just don't have the bandwidth at this point in my life."

In truth, she has a lot going on. Fox is set to host a reality-TV show she helped develop about fashion upcycling, and she recently shot a small role as a real-estate agent in an upcoming Steven Soderbergh film, having already worked with him in 2021's *No Way Out*. (She has stayed in touch with the Safdies, but has no plans to work with them anytime soon: "They're doing another movie with Adam, but they didn't ask me to be in it, so whatever.")

She also wrote a movie that's in preproduction about two girls who accidentally kill their sugar daddy. The movie, she says, is essentially about the lengths young women must go to to navigate the world without family support. "If you're looking at the girl who has the rich dad and the nice car and you want the car, too, you're gonna have to make some decisions that you'll then have to live with," she says. "I feel like that's kind of what the theme of the movie is." (Her dream casting for the lead is the one thing she told me during our conversation that was off the record; suffice to say it is, in true Julia Fox fashion, both off-the-wall and kind of perfect.)

It's a fitting screenwriting debut for a woman who, as Andalore describes it, has adopted, and will continue to adopt, a "survivor mentality" throughout her entire life, one that is encapsulated by one scene in *Down the Drain,* when Fox is at a famous rapper's party in Miami Beach with West. After being chastised by a member of his entourage for twerking on the dance floor, a chastened Fox scans a "sea of neon party dresses and BBLs" looking for West. Of the women, she writes, "they willingly fade into the background, waiting for their come-up. They're party decorations, ornaments to be admired. I'm not like that anymore. I already had my come-up, and I'm not going back to being objectified and used as fuel for the egos of insecure men."

I ask Fox if, when she was writing this passage, and when she was dating West, she was thinking at all about Antoine, the older French millionaire who had treated her as his poupée. She says she saw some parallels. "[I was thinking], 'I had already been chosen, [and] reaped all the benefits, and then lost it all,' " she says. "And I already knew that that wasn't the road to happiness for me. I'd already gone through that whole cycle. And it was like, 'Wait a minute, I'm being told to get back in line.' No. I can live without this. I'm good." ®

[*Cont. from 53*] that means taking hits. Tonight, he's on the undercard of local favorite Manny "Gucci" Flores and against a skilled opponent, but he's not about to change who he is.

Second round, he comes out fists flying, eager to press home his early advantage in the four-round bout, but Gutierrez ducks and dodges, then counters with a left hook to Manuel's jaw, followed by another.

Manuel chases Gutierrez across the ring, walking onto two quick-fire uppercuts from his opponent that draw "*oooohs*" from the crowd, and after a clinch, Manuel's caught again by a straight right.

"There you go!" shouts Gutierrez's coaches from the corner, clearly liking their fighter's resurgence. "Take his fucking head off!" another at ringside bawls. "Pat has no power!"

The bell rings, a Hapollo rap tune pumps across the canvas, and Manuel returns, blinking, to his corner. As a ring girl in black hot pants parades the Round Three card to the crowd, Valenzuela implores Manuel to stop lunging in. But that's easier said than done for a fighter hard-wired to engage – especially when the opportunity to take part in more fights like this might become all but impossible.

In a bid to ease the hand-wringing of governing bodies around the world, the IOC released new guidelines in November 2021. "No athlete should be excluded from competition on the exclusive ground of an unverified, alleged, or perceived unfair competitive advantage due to their sex variations, physical appearance, and/or transgender status," the IOC wrote, before adding that any restrictions should be implemented only on the strength of "robust and peer-reviewed research."

However, for all of its moral weight in the sporting landscape, the IOC has no jurisdiction over professional-boxing governing bodies such as the WBC, and consequently, career fighters compete under the rules and guidelines specific to the body sanctioning their prize fights.

WBC's Sulaimán was open about the lack of trans-specific medical studies funded by the WBC to inform its position, but maintained, despite noncompliance with the IOC, that its plans were made with safety as a prime concern.

"There have been no separate studies for transgender boxing per se," Sulaimán confirms. "However, we've created a committee, and we're listening to the concerns of the [trans] community."

The trans-boxer community the WBC is "listening to," Sulaimán admits, consists of a very limited number of individuals, with only three actively fighting. On this basis, a transgender division is almost impossible because of a lack of numbers alone. So why is the WBC pushing so hard to create a ruling that could curtail the career of Manuel and his peers?

"I am concerned about [Manuel's] safety," Sulaimán says. "He's 38 years old, and competing against men with his different bone and neck structure, and [higher] rates of concussion."

The WBC's position on trans athletes was largely formed from commissioned studies conducted on women fighters nearly a decade ago, where "lots of medical data," according to Sulaimán, was used to determine female-specific rules. The WBC's 2014 press statement lists reasons like the menstrual cycle creating physical changes in women, and the "physical inclination of women to have more concussions" for adopting its template across the sport.

"It is not safe for women to fight more than 10 two-minute rounds," Sulaimán reiterated to me via video call. "In tennis, women play three sets; in golf, they tee off from a shorter distance, etc., etc."

The shorter competition time for women's fights remains controversial with the WBC's alleged findings coming from a report that has never been shared publicly, despite requests from ROLLING STONE, and that remains contested among neurologists and medical experts.

Dr. Meeryo Choe, a women's brain-health specialist and pediatric neurologist at UCLA who took part in the study and who sat on the WBC's medical advisory board, told The Ringer in 2018 that her work had been misunderstood, and that despite the WBC's assertions, there was no way to statistically determine that women have "almost 80 percent more concussion probability than men." (Choe did not respond to ROLLING STONE's request for comment.)

And in a report published in the *Orthopedic Journal of Sports Medicine,* based on a review of 25 studies of female sports-related concussions, its suggestion that women are more vulnerable to concussions and suffer more prolonged symptoms than men was caveated by the fact that female athletes remain an "understudied population" in this area, with research explaining why female athletes have worse outcomes being "limited."

"The work's been done on men, less than 10 percent has been done [on] women. It's just very skewed," says Robert Cantu, a clinical professor of neurology and neurosurgery at Boston University School of Medicine and co-founder of its Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy Center. According to Cantu, there's also another key reason why published studies convey a greater vulnerability to concussion in women:

"On average, they're more honest about reporting their symptoms. And they're probably more honest about also reporting symptoms [that] are continuing. So that theory alone could explain why the incidence of concussion is higher in women than it is in guys and why their symptoms last longer. In my mind, the literature may be flawed by the reporting bias."

Women aside, Cantu is "not aware of any good studies" – which he defines as 50 to 100 athletes who would be assessed over the course of 10 years at the cost of between $500,000 and $1 million – currently being carried out on transgender concussion.

"One's skills and abilities should dictate whether [transgender fighters] can do something or not," Cantu says. "I don't think there is solid medical data to say their brain is more vulnerable."

The WBC has been assessing the viability of transgender boxing for "three to four years," according to Sulaimán, but it was only in 2022 that its committee's findings came together in a press release that proclaimed the WBC's "unequivocal support for transgender rights," followed soon after with its intention to launch a trans division in 2023. These plans have so far stalled, and when pushed, Sulaimán admits that much could change in the following months and years should compelling medical research emerge. For organizations like USAB, the national governing body for amateur boxing, a boxer transitioning from male to female is eligible to compete in the female category only after gender-reassignment surgery, and a minimum of four years on hormones. Testing for correct levels of testosterone is also a prerequisite to competition.

Sonya "the Scholar" Lamonakis is the vice president of USAB for the New York metro area, as well as a four-time Golden Gloves winner and former IBO heavyweight world champion. Coincidentally, she won one of her national Golden Gloves championships alongside Patricio Manuel in 2009, and still has the photograph of them celebrating together. Lamonakis oversees every sanctioned amateur fight around New York City and, as a result, is in contact with around 40 trans boxers who train, but only "one or two" who take part in fights. For Lamonakis, applying the same policy used for amateurs to the professional realm should be approached with caution.

"You can't take out the shoulders. You can't take out the wingspan. You can't take out the bigger lungs, [hearts, and organs that men have]. In the amateurs, it's fine – everyone wears headgear, 12-ounce gloves [which have more padding], and there are safety procedures, but with the professionals? I'm not sure it should be happening."

GLEASON'S GYM HAS been a mainstay of the New York fight scene since it was founded in 1937. Originally located in the Bronx, the gym relocated to Brooklyn in 1987 and claims to have welcomed more than 130 champions during its illustrious history, including Jake LaMotta, Roberto Duran, Muhammad Ali, Julio Cesar Chavez, and Mike Tyson.

Initially, the gym was reserved for pro fighters. But when Bruce Silverglade took ownership in 1982, Gleason's began programs for white-collar businessmen and, more controversially, women. What started with a handful of boxers has grown to more than 400 active female members today, and is just one of a number of programs Silverglade runs to promote inclusion and diversity.

"You have to like the sport of boxing and you have to want to try it out. What you do on the outside or what you do in your personal life does not matter to me," Silverglade says. "Everybody is treated equal. Mike Tyson had to pay dues here. If Hillary Swank was up here training for *Million Dollar Baby* and she wanted to hit the heavy bag, she had to wait her turn. 'Sammy the Bull' Gravana, John Gotti's right-hand man, he trained up here. As long as people remain respectful, mind the rules of the gym, then they're welcome. Everyone pays the same fee, and gets treated the same. Except Muhammad Ali, he was different."

As well as classes for veterans, children, neurodiverse individuals, and Parkinson's sufferers, Gleason's is also the proud home of Trans Boxing, a group founded by coach Nolan Hanson in 2017 that's dedicated to supporting those who want to box free of the limitations of "gender identity."

"It's a project to challenge things like racism, misogyny, transphobia, and late-stage capitalism, you know, all the things that support our patriarchal economic system," Hanson, the 32-year-old athletically built, buzz-haired coach says as he moves past fighters working the big leather punching bags, the chains from which they hang chinking with each hit.

Hanson has run workshops for trans boxers in San Francisco; Portland, Oregon; Seattle; and New Orleans, but it's in Brooklyn – in the rings that intersperse the concrete columns of the Gleason's building, and where posters of Ali and Sugar Ray Robinson look knowingly down from walls – that his sessions found a more permanent home.

"I found a lot of acceptance here," Hanson says, directing one of his students to jump rope in front of a full-length mirror just as a buzzer signals the start of another three-minute round. "Bruce has been great. I feel really comfortable with him."

Silverglade remembers being cautiously optimistic about the idea when Nolan first presented him with it. "I mean, I was absolutely going to allow [trans boxers] to come in, but there was one member of 20 years, a professional heavyweight who had a problem with it. So I had to tell him his attitude wasn't proper, that he needed to be tolerant to everybody up here, and if he wasn't, he'd have to leave."

According to Hanson, the expelled heavyweight had harassed one of his cohorts in the locker room to such an extent that his fighter never returned. Gleason's now has signs detailing New York state law regarding gender expression and identity.

"That was really scary, that really sucked, but I've been here like two years, and that's happened once," Hanson says.

Moving to the edge of a nearby ring, Hanson greets another one of his fighters, who is warming up for a sparring session: Kerry "Miles" Thomas, a USAB-certified coach and social worker, who joined the Trans Boxing project in 2018.

"There was a time I thought I'd never be able to walk into a boxing gym and be welcomed," he says during a rest between a rigorous set of situps.

"I think a lot of us in the community, with the things we've been through, rejection from families, you know, maybe we've hurt ourselves in different ways: [Boxing] can help us claim our self-esteem back, helps us find resiliency," says Thomas, a specialist in trauma-informed care and post-traumatic growth. "It's definitely helped me to find that resiliency. It's a very healthy coping mechanism."

Thomas says he almost "lost his life" 20 years ago, before he started to transition. Now, at 38, he hopes that being visible here shows other trans people they don't have to "hide in the shadows."

With Thomas' situps complete, Hanson helps him fit his headgear so he's ready to spar. The opposing fighter – a cisgender man – is already waiting for him in the ring, and at the next bell, they begin to trade blows, Hanson shouting advice from the corner.

"Get your distance with your jab, Kerry! Just pop it, pop it out. There you go. You gotta watch your feet, though, they cross up. Yo, watch that!"

Though both Hanson and Thomas are amateurs with no plans to fight professionally, both are upset by the WBC's plans for a transgender division and its binary assessment of fighters from their community.

"They're trying to get ahead of a problem that actually doesn't exist – which is that trans women are going to invade the elite women's category and strip them of their belts," Hanson says, eyes still on his fighter's movements. "I'm a trans person. I'm a boxing trainer. I'm in this world. I know professional boxers, but I don't know any trans-women elite boxers. So, this policy is dealing with a phantom problem."

It's a sentiment that, once he recovers from his sparring session, Thomas agrees with. "I'm currently involved in a study regarding hormone-replacement therapy [in sports]," he says. "I rely on testosterone exogenous medication, but I truly believe, once we have the data, the science will show I have no advantage or disadvantage [over other fighters]."

When the buzzer calls every fighter of Gleason's back to their workout activities, Hanson heads off to find those he'd left jumping rope.

"It's not inclusion, it's segregation, you know what I mean?" he says. "I'm sure there will be some motherfuckers that are just like: 'I want a WBC belt.' Fine, do it. But it's not cool. This kind of rhetoric, it's really not doing any good."

BY THE TIME the bell marking the end of the fourth and final round rings out, Patricio Manuel has blood running down the side of his face; an accidental clash of heads, earlier in the round, has badly cut his eye. Regardless, the two fighters pat gloves and wait for the announcer to come onto the microphone with the verdict.

"So, we go to the scorecards," he says, building suspense. "And all three judges see it the same, 40 to 36. Your winner by unanimous decision ... and still undefeated: Patricio Manuel!"

Referee Reiss raises Manuel's hand, the victor's salute to the cheering crowd. The eye will need stitches before the night is out, but first, Manuel heads backstage to give his postfight reactions, returning to the tent where the night started. He's calm, undoubtedly happy with the win, but reserved and contained.

"I'm glad that I have the victory, but I'm still a little disappointed in my performance. In my next fight, you'll see a lot more maturity from me," he says as his perfectionism pushes aside any modicum of hubris. "A hysterical fighter is a fighter that's gonna be in danger for themselves. So I always try to make sure that I'm in control of myself at all times."

Manuel's control and confidence have helped those closest to him endure his battles in the ring, too.

"It is stressful, you know, for me to watch him. No parent wants to see their child hurt and bleeding," Manuel's mother, Loretta Butler, says of the 70-plus fights she's seen her son come through over the years.

"But, it's his lifetime's dream, so that outweighs any physical pain. I remember driving back from Home Depot and him telling me he was going to transition. And the first thing I asked was 'What about boxing?' Because I knew how much he loved it."

She'd been there for Manuel's struggle through the amateur ranks of women's boxing, and his depression after injury ended the dream of competing in the first female Olympic boxing tournament of 2012.

Back then, as a five-time national amateur champion, there were many who felt that Manuel's talent and power were enough to deliver a professional world title in the female division. For his mother, however, this was not a realistic option.

"Where would the real joy come from if he wasn't his true self? I mean, money's not going to bring that," she says. "And he's a man, he was born a man. Biology just fucked up in some way. I gave birth to a son."

Before the fight, Manuel had lamented how the transgender community is being used as a wedge issue to drive fear and fuel political fervor in America, and how disappointing it was that groups and individuals helped to "fund such narratives."

Boxing has often been used as a platform for advocacy, the spotlight of combat acting as metaphor for the greater fight happening outside of the ring; but in this moment of triumph against adversity, Manuel is reflective about the marker he'd just laid down.

"You know, I'm just here living my life as any other boxer does," he says. "I know it's exciting for people outside of the sport, but for me, I'm just one step closer to the next fight and doing better.

"I'm just someone that wants to live my life just like every other person out there. That is a human desire, regardless of your gender identity, race, sex, whatever you want to talk about. We're all just trying to live our life on our own terms. And for me, I just happen to be a boxer. That's it."

BIOLOGIST'S FRAGRANCE ADDITIVES INCREASE AFFECTION FROM OTHERS

These cosmetics increase attention to you. Created by the co-discoverer of human pheromones. Dr. Cutler has authored 8 books on wellness and 50 scientific papers.

ATHENA PHEROMONE

10x™ for women tm 10x™ for men

unscented fragrance additives

♥ Julie (CAN) "I tried the 10:13 for the first time last night. **My husband professed his love for me 4 times in 30 minutes!** Maybe he was getting a concentrated dose (in the car). Let's just say that this result is way above the baseline, shall we?"

♥ Ken (WA) **"My wife likes me better when I wear 10X.** When I wear the 10X **she wants to be with me."**

ATHENA PHEROMONES™ INCREASE ATTRACTIVENESS

athenainstitute.com

Vial of 1/6 oz. added to 2-4 oz. of your fragrance **lasts 4 to 6 mos., or use straight** Contains human synthesized pheromones.

Works for most, but not all. **NOT SOLD IN STORES.** Cosmetics; not aphrodisiacs.

Call: 610-827-2200

or send to **Athena Institute, Dept RS, 1211 Brafield Rd. Chester Springs, PA 19425**

SAVE $100: 6-Pak special

Please send me__vials of 10:13 for women@$98.50 and/or___ vials of 10X for men @$99.50 for a *total _____ by: ❑ money order, ❑ check ❑ Visa,M/C,Disc._____-_____-_____-_____ Exp._____ CVV:____ Sign:_____ to: Name_____ Address_____ City/State_____zip_____ Tel:_____ email_____ *PA add 6% tax, Shipping see website RS

[*Cont. from 63*] sharing this most difficult and humble confession with you sir.

"I think you will not only be shocked and amazed, but it will give you a transparency about me that you've never had before," he continued. "As I continue to remain, in hope and trust."

Harry, the landlord, and others knew Derek during this time as Kelly, or Kellee. The email, however, included two hokey, homemade FBI wanted posters for "Maverick Nehemiah Marsalis," who was "wanted for a series of counterfeiting and fraudulent white-collar securities crimes against American banks and the U.S. government. Considered highly calculated and extreemly (sic) persuasive." Attached was a Word document titled "The King of Confidence," which, in the style of a magazine feature, outlined "the most successful and prolific counterfeiter of US Savings Bonds in US Treasury history," who succeeded in spite of racism to pass $20 million in fake bonds with a team of six white "All-American[s]." Maverick was encouraged to break his silence, he alleged, after reading about the exploits of Frank Abagnale, the subject of *Catch Me If You Can,* and foiled forger Frank Bourassa. "I declare," he concluded, "that I am The Greatest Counterfeiter & Confidence Man of All Time. Bar None."

I choked on my coffee when Harry forwarded me the message this March. There it was: the bonds caper, the All-American Team. It was a 5,400-word version of the story I recognized from *The CONfidence Chronicles* – six years before Derek told the tale to Cheryl Dorsey, and seven before ROLLING STONE sent me to Atlanta, where he'd revisit the saga to drag me, the magazine, and a Hollywood director, into his most outrageous con yet.

ALL GOOD LEGENDS need a paper trail – and Derek began laying the digital foundations for his counterfeiter alter ego in 2019. That year, a website called Voyage LA published an article nearly identical to the 2015 story and told readers to "Meet Maverick Miles." There was nary a mention of the dating scams or the ripped-off friends and associates. (He did mention the car theft, calling it a "sordid allegation.") It detailed instead the story he'd seeded since leaving college – the Native American ancestry, the Colonel, the fancy upbringing, the All-American Team, and of course, the $20 million counterfeiting "caper." It was as if Derek had been flipping the elements of his alter ego's life story like the panels of a Rubik's Cube – and in Maverick Miles Nehemiah, they had all slotted, harmoniously, into place.

Two years later, Dorsey wrote *The CONfidence Chronicles,* and in February 2022, I got that WhatsApp message from Maverick Miles. By then, Derek – as Maverick – had a significant social media footprint, with thousands of Twitter followers and a fan base of about 100,000 on Instagram, where he posted near-daily images and videos of cars, planes, clothing, and portraits of old. Little matter that he reposted the same photo with different stories, or that some of the images were Photoshopped worse than a sixth-grade design project: By last October, when I flew to Atlanta, Derek had reimagined his long list of actual cons with a single, enormous – but exaggerated – one.

Looking back, the lie seems obvious, and I'm embarrassed to admit my own credulity in this article. But from the moment I stepped off the tarmac in Georgia, Derek was smooth and uncoiled, and he oozed Southern charm whether holding open the Cayenne's passenger door or braking to gift unhoused people $20 bills. Though age has softened his linebacker's frame – a fact he appears to have acknowledged via a rotating wardrobe of sweatpants and loose-fitting shirts – it is easy to imagine him attracting the attention of women, and he speaks in a baritone as polished as the rims on his prized vehicles.

We spent long days driving from his old house, to Northside High, to where he claimed he'd valeted for Atlanta royalty including Ted Turner. We spoke about music a lot: If I liked an album – the Stones' *Sticky Fingers* or Steely Dan's *Aja* – Derek would have it blaring when I hopped into the Porsche the following day. He never stumbled or hesitated when describing seminal moments from his life, and punched out righteous polemic like he was standing at the pulpit. "Society in America is rigged," he says. "Black people are born into a world: 'It's not for you. We don't want you here. You can't come in here. I don't want you to drink this water fountain, can't use this bathroom. We don't want you at this school.' All people are trying to do is overcome that."

As was the case with Derek's counterfeiting tale, there are truths sprinkled between the lies. He did go to Northside High (hobbies: photography, music, sports; nickname: Mad Dog), and his folks did live a couple of blocks from Atlanta's "Berlin Wall." In *The CONfidence Chronicles,* Maverick stresses his desire to steal only from the U.S. Treasury, invoking the death of George Floyd and the Jan. 6 riots. Racial injustice was a frequent topic of our conversations in Atlanta – which serves to make his real scams, which have victimized many men and women of color, even more unnerving. His con artistry may be vast and spectacular, but having attempted to parse his motivations for the better part of two years, I can't see beyond a simple cocktail of narcissism and greed.

It was as if Derek had been flipping the elements of his alter ego's life story like the panels of a Rubik's Cube – and in Maverick Miles Nehemiah, they had all slotted, harmoniously, into place.

Each night we ate three courses at an upmarket spot; sometimes lunch, too. Only our final meal – to which, similar to Kelly Ross' experience of his presenting as a sheik in Houston, Derek wore a yarmulke – did I convince him to let me pay. On one occasion, he drove me to a Neiman Marcus where, he said, he'd kitted out the All-Americans in their high-end clothing, and offered to buy me a Tom Ford suit in homage to them – which I politely declined.

Derek groomed me, much as he had countless others. I enjoyed his company and considered him more than a journalistic subject. He told me he'd discovered me in late 2021 through a feature I'd co-written about a New York art forger, and we discussed the piece at length. When I told Derek last summer that my partner and I were expecting our first child, he messaged back in moments. "Just wow!" he wrote. "I'm sending up prayers." Just as he did with his romance-scam victims, he mentioned my name almost constantly, and flattered my modest professional achievements.

Moreover, Derek appeared to understand a key component of modern journalism. As newsrooms shutter and streaming services thrive, magazine writers increasingly look to the sums TV and movie production companies will pay to option our stories. This secondary income has turned a generation of freelancers into Captain Ahabs, desperately seeking stories that translate from the page to the screen. Derek baited the possibility of a movie deal almost from the very beginning of our relationship, and I fell for his lies hook and line. His magnetism was disorienting – and at times blinding. As he threatened to go elsewhere with the story, I emailed him an early draft, before I knew who he really was. Journalists are never supposed to share stories with sources before publication – a practice I knew better than to flout. But he didn't feel like just any source; it seemed like we were on the same side. Partners, even. And that was a dire mistake.

"He sought you out," Leo would later tell me, chillingly. "He's really good about that."

When I discovered Derek's true identity, I was mad with rage – not least because I had a baby on the way, and publishing his grandiose tale could've sunk my career. Once the breadth of his deceptions became half-clear, I thought I saw his guises everywhere. I spent days trying to reach a Washington state printworks named Maverick Label, convinced it was him, and chased dead-end leads on a financial website named MaverickPayments. I followed dozens of red herrings. Then I read back through the PDF of *The CONfidence Chronicles* for clues. That's when I found "The List."

Tucked toward the back of the file, Derek had named more than a hundred people who'd "bent over backwards to help me on my life's journey." Rachel, Kerry, Amanda, Leo, everybody – they were all there. If inviting a journalist into his world was ballsy, presenting this list as "soldiers who were 100% loyal to me" was off the chart. Lewis Hyde, author of the seminal con-artist book *Trickster Makes This World,* doesn't think it's a misstep. "Many confidence men believe their story," he tells me. "There could even be a kind of desperation to it, because if the story falls apart, what do they have left? So acknowledging his marks – it demands the bluff to be called."

When I struggled to find additional sources, Derek put up Leo and "Fantasia," a former team member, for me to interview. When I discovered the truth, I confronted them both. Fantasia confessed immediately. Her name is Tonya Manley, a former model living in Southern California whom Derek first met in Atlanta circa the Nineties. She'd starred in a couple of his titillating movies years later. "ROLLING STONE's gonna do an article on me," she recalls him telling her. "And some of it's gonna be on the paper trail that I did years ago. And I just wanted you to be in it."

When she pushed back, he told her, "Just be nonchalant."

As time dragged, and my spreadsheet of sources swelled to almost 200 people, Derek dangled another carrot. Monty Ross, a filmmaker best known for his work alongside Spike Lee on hits including *She's Gotta Have It* and *Do the Right Thing,* was in talks to make the Maverick Nehemiah movie – and Derek wanted me to write the script.

When, days later, I discovered Derek's true identity, I assumed that Derek had enlist- [*Cont. on 80*]

COSTOLO

[*Cont. from 78*] ed somebody from his past to act as Ross. Derek arranged a three-way call soon after that, and I asked Ross if he'd video-call me afterward. I was surprised when he agreed, and shocked when, moments after hanging up with Derek, I redialed and there was the real Monty Ross speaking to me from his dining room with his unmistakably laconic voice and salt-and-pepper beard.

Derek and Ross had been talking for months, he tells me. Not only that, but Ross had drafted a script for the movie adaptation of *The CONfidence Chronicles*. He was knocked almost speechless when I told him Derek had been playing us both. "He's been trying to get everybody to hurry up with making the script, playing us off against each other," Ross says, piecing together the scam in real time. "I never thought you would call to say this."

By then I had already spoken with more than 50 people, peeling back the layers of Derek's life like an onion. I saved for last those he was either currently scamming or in league with. That included Cheryl Dorsey. Her autobiography, *Black and Blue,* exposed the discrimination she'd experienced as an LAPD sergeant, for which she'd received a sizable civil settlement. She had since pivoted to TV, appearing on the news to discuss race and policing in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Surely, I thought for months – she had to be in on it.

Because of that, I wait until March to tell her what I know. When I get her on the phone, it becomes clear within moments that he was using her to launder his reputation. "This is really blowing me away," she tells me. "I'm speechless. How do I unring this bell?"

Derek first slid into Dorsey's Instagram DMs – as Maverick – on Nov. 30, 2020. "I'd be honored to have the REAL opportunity to befriend and know you as a Human Being," he wrote, before adding a link to the Voyage LA piece. They seemed to have so much in common. "I am adopted," she tells me. "He told me he's adopted. I had a husband who was killed in a car accident. He told me he had a fiancée who was killed in a car accident." Eventually, Dorsey tells me, her "friendly interrogation" of Maverick paid off, and he allowed her to commit his counterfeiting tale to print. The names Derek and Kelly cropped up in her research, and she was nervous for her reputation. But Dorsey assumed he'd switched names for a "fresh start," she tells me. She didn't reach out to members of the All-American Team, or ask for any more contacts. "I wasn't doing any deep dives," she says. "I was really just trusting in my own intuition."

The pandemic prevented them from meeting in person, but Dorsey and Derek texted all day, every day. One time they spoke on the phone for 17 hours straight. She called it a situationship. It felt like love. "He was grooming me," she tells me.

Lockdowns lifted, and the pair met in real life. In August 2021, he suggested an apartment closer to him in L.A., and she moved there weeks later. Right around then, Derek began complaining that he couldn't pay rent on his new hangar. He knew about her recent settlement and "he was trying to get me to, he was calling it, invest in him," she tells me. He wanted $100,000. She loaned him $8,000.

"How do I get my $8,000 back?" she asks me. Shortly after we spoke that first time, Dorsey called a friend. "I told her, 'Girl – I got my own Dirty John.' "

The CONfidence Chronicles published in October 2021. Dorsey used her TV connections to plug it on air. "Oh, my God, honey, you're gonna have me do a good old Southern-boy yee-haw," he voice-messaged her the following March, after she appeared on MSNBC. " 'The greatest crime story never told' – What the actual fuck! Excuse my French, but that is really, really special, honey. I'm so proud of you, I'm so excited, so thrilled about how everything is coming together.

"And believe me when I tell you," he added – "we're gonna get us a movie deal. We're gonna get us the deal we've been looking for. I promise you this."

I suspected Dorsey and I hadn't been the only ones in media to get on board with the story, and I was right: In February last year, Jeff Singer, an L.A.-based TV and podcast producer, read Dorsey's book. "I said, 'Wow – if half of that is true, I can easily sell it as a movie or a TV show,' " he says. Singer signed an option contract with Dorsey, but he tore it up when he came across the same RipOffReport posts that derailed this article. When Singer confronted him, Derek said, " 'Anyone could say that about you – and then you'd have to fight it regardless of whether it was true.' And I'm like, 'Is this guy threatening me?'

"I said to Cheryl, 'Have you fact-checked this book?' " he says. "And she said, 'No.' She pointed to the [Voyage LA] article. I felt bad for her.... I don't want her credibility to be ruined – an ex-law-enforcement officer who got conned by a master criminal."

As winter turned to spring and my article still hadn't published, Derek stepped up his attempts to hurry the story along. He told me an *L.A. Times* reporter wanted the story, but wouldn't say who. Incredibly, until this May, Derek still didn't seem to know I was onto him. Then I spoke to his friend Leo, and conveyed my suspicions about Maverick's story. Days later, Derek deleted his WhatsApp and several of his social media profiles.

The closer we got to the publication date for this story, the stranger things got.

Somebody claiming to be Derek's former PA called me, saying she could disprove some of the RipOffReport posts about him. She wouldn't do that, however, until she could verify with my editor, via email, that I was writing the article. After I shared the address, ROLLING STONE received a 2,400-word "cease & desist" email from Derek as Maverick Miles Nehemiah, forwarded by somebody claiming to be his attorney. In the letter, Derek alleged, among other things, that I had "harassed," "stalked," and "slandered" him to friends and family; conducted "journalistic criminality with malicious vindictive and damaging intent," and had shared private information with Rachel, whom he described as a "bitter, deranged, mentally unstable and desperate ex-girlfriend." He also characterized me as a "rogue Journalist, a self confessed (to me) former Heroin drug addict, who does not have a scintilla of journalistic integrity." (I mentioned to Derek in Atlanta that I had once tried the drug many years ago.) Derek threatened to release humiliating recordings of me should his demand for the story to be spiked not be met. Beyond unflattering sounds of me eating burgers, I had no idea what that kompromat may be.

And in August, Leo did a 180 in emails to ROLLING STONE's fact checker. "I guess you're aware that Sean did some real dirty work on me," Leo wrote. "Sean double-crossed me and had some bad motives to call me like that and saying some very ugly things about Maverick, about how he was going to blindside him with this story and ruin his life and put him in jail and personally ruin the man ... I could tell he had it in for Maverick, like he was jealous and hating on the man. So I just played along with his vendetta game and acted like I would go along with it."

When I interviewed Leo in the spring, he'd offered to record conversations with Maverick for me. My editor told me it was a bad idea – which I told Leo. But in his email to the fact checker, he twisted the story, saying I'd asked him to record his friend. And that I'd offered him money if he helped me – which isn't true.

Then, 48 hours before the story was set to go to the printers, I found out the lengths to which Derek would go. He sent me a copy of a defamation lawsuit he claimed he's filed against me, Monty Ross, my editor, and ROLLING STONE's lawyer – for $100 million.

The lawsuit claims I "made numerous false and damaging statements about the Plaintiff."

"Nehemiah spent extensive amounts of time together with Williams over the course of approximately one week in Atlanta, Georgia at his own expense chauffeuring him around town, detailing the different aspects of the historical criminality, and aiding him in having sufficient material that he needed to write the story that he had secured the commission from Rolling Stone magazine," it read. It claimed my actions were "malicious," including "the spreading of salacious rumors, half truths and lies," and that by reporting I'd caused "severe emotional distress" – not to mention that the story would "destroy the contractual relationships that Nehemiah had with Monty Ross for a Hollywood movie deal." When I discovered the monetary gain to be made from Ross' script, Derek alleges, I persuaded Ross to partner with me instead – a lie. The lawsuit also confirmed my suspicion that Leo had in April reached out to Derek about my questions of his real identity. And it includes Leo's false claims about my asking him to record their conversations and offer to pay him.

At other times in my life, I might've been stunned by a nine-figure lawsuit. But after two years of dealing with Derek, nothing he does surprises me.

PEOPLE TARGETED BY scammers like Derek are often perceived as desperate or overly credulous. According to the Department of Justice, only 14 percent of financial-fraud victims in 2017 reported incidents to police. I share the embarrassment of those who fell for Derek's charms. He conned us with the promise of a good story, and beyond that, a far more elemental craving: connection.

I'm one of the lucky ones, though. I was incredibly fortunate to have ROLLING STONE's researcher flag that post that led to my unraveling of the real story. But a director who spent months producing a documentary about Derek's car collection hasn't been paid what he says Derek owes him – and likely never will. I have a particular sympathy for Rachel, whom Derek had gotten pregnant, then ghosted and taunted online. Nobody took her seriously at the time, she tells me. "You feel like you're a crazy woman." She's worried what will happen when Derek reads this story, too – she doesn't know "what he is doing or what type of people he is dealing with."

Rachel has a tough time trusting people, and flips out when she catches her son – Derek's son – lying to her. She doesn't date, she tells me, and she's still in therapy. "I'm exhausted.... Even speaking to you is very scary for me, because it's like, 'Oh, is this gonna come out making me look like the crazy woman?' "

But, she adds, "I'm not. I have been raising a kid by myself, and I have an amazing son. And I worked very hard and I established myself. I don't have a lot of money, but I'm OK.

"The person who is crazy is *this* man."

'THE BEST OF' 2023

Magico S3 Floorstanding Loudspeaker Pair

Magico's hyper-engineered marvel: Graphene, aluminum, carbon fiber, beryllium, diamond, titanium. The S3 stereo speakers bring your favorite music to life.

magicoaudio.com | @magico_llc | facebook.com/MagicoLLC

Paperlike

iPad Screen Protector by Paperlike

Write and draw on your iPad like you would on paper. Bring improved precision and control to your digital workspace.

paperlike.com
@paperlike

HEAVEN'S DOOR Bob Dylan

Celebratory Release Homesick Blues

Heaven's Door unveils its limited edition 7-year-old wheated bourbon whiskey. Crafted from Minnesota's finest, in honor of Bob Dylan's hometown roots.

HEAVENSDOOR.com
@HEAVENSDOORWHISKEY

WEMAX

WEMAX NOVA

Unmatched 4K Laser Projector with Stunning Clarity. Elevate your home theater experience.

10% OFF
Coupon Code: WXVIP1F

wemax.com

BEACN

Be Heard with BEACN Mic

Create, stream, conquer with BEACN Mic: Elevate your content effortlessly, making your livestream or podcast shine on PC or Mac.

Use Code: ROLLINGSTONE for 20% off cart total at beacn.com | twitter.com/beacn

UPLIFT DESK

Work Better. Live Healthier.

Build your dream workspace! Improve health, productivity, and comfort with an award-winning standing desk. Free shipping/returns. 15 year warranty.

upliftdesk.com

andover

The "E" is for "essential"

At $1,499, the Andover-One E all-one-record player is ideal for bedrooms, dorms, and offices; and as a music lover's first system.

andoveraudio.com | @andoveraudio

mon MORE NATURAL premium sound

More Natural Premium Sonic Experience

Bring concert to your home. Experience unrivaled sound image and stage with the latest Virtual-Coaxial design bookshelf speakers from Mon Acoustic.

Coupon code: ROLLING10
(Starts from Oct 1st, 2023 ~ Oct 31st, 2023)

monacoustic.us

INTERSTELLAR AUDIO MACHINES

Octonaut = Out of This World Tones

A classic in the making, experience legendary tones with THE pedal trusted by Derek Trucks, Richard Fortus, & Jimmy Herring.

interstellaraudiomachines.com
@interstellaraudiomachines

GEL BLASTER

Gel Blaster is bringing the iconic Ken vs. Ryu blaster to life. This exciting collaboration promises an authentic and thrilling gaming experience for fans of the legendary Street Fighter franchise.

gelblaster.com

GEM JOY

Your Very Own Dragon

When you put on this technology bracelet you will be transported to new worlds as bold as you. Share all 50 secrets inside with the people you love.

Experience Gem Joy at **GemJoy.com**

susan G. komen.

InstantIV Advanced Hydration Technology

STICK IT TO BREAST CANCER

Hydrate with a purpose. Every stick purchased helps save a life! Nourish your body and help put an end to breast cancer!

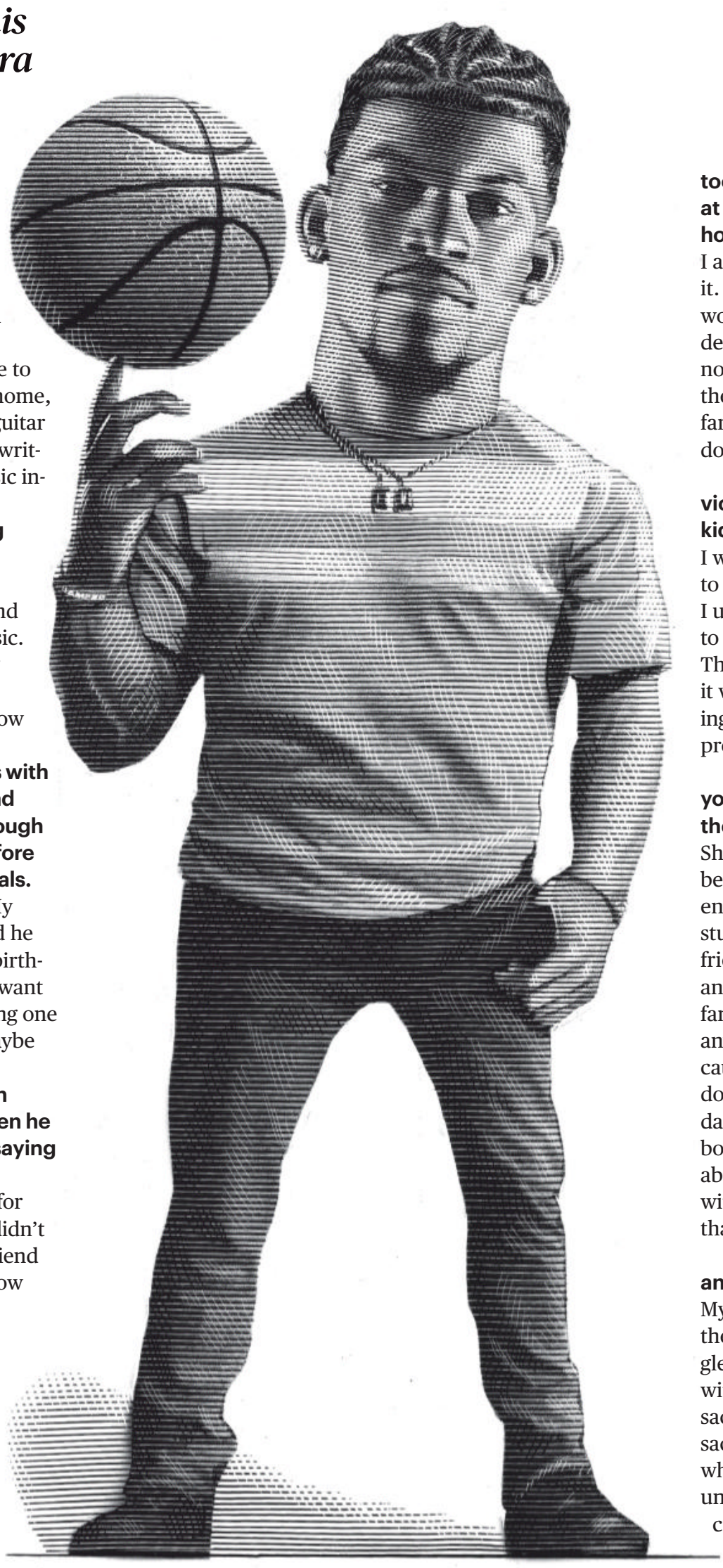
Coupon code: ROLLING25 for 25% off.

myinstantiv.com

H2O Media inc. | H2Omedia.com | hello@h2omedia.com

Jimmy Butler

The NBA star on country music, his friend Morgan Wallen, and Shakira



What have been the highlights of your offseason Unexpected Tour in China?
It's just incredible to know that somebody even knows my name on that side of the world. But the best thing is I've been able to grow my dad skills. I'm getting really good at this dad thing.

When did you first fall in love with country music?
My senior year at Marquette everyone in the locker room was listening to Lil Wayne and Jay-Z, and I love the hip-hop world as well, but I kept telling them to turn the music down. They said, "Worry about what's in your headphones." So I went home and googled, "What's the most country song?" The first song that came up is "Don't Take the Girl," by Tim McGraw. I blared that song in the locker room. Then, I listened to the lyrics and learned about more country singers. So I went from Tim McGraw to Faith Hill to Brad Paisley to Kenny Chesney to Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks. Now, I'm knee-deep in it and see as many concerts as I can.

Butler is a forward for the Miami Heat.

You're a fan of Garth Brooks, but are you also into Chris Gaines?
The first country concert I saw when I became an NBA player was Garth Brooks. I was trying to learn to play guitar. I was sitting front row and I'm not even listening to the music; I was watching his hand movements playing guitar. Afterwards, I go backstage and I was just looking at his hands, which were so calloused from playing guitar. I said, "So, if I'm going to get as good as you, my hands will have to look like that?" I went home, and I never touched a guitar again. Now, I'm on the writing side of country music instead of playing guitar.

I hear you're writing and recording music with Nashville artists.
I'm in the lab writing and producing country music. There's definitely going to be an album. That's the goal. I just don't know when.

I read you're friends with Morgan Wallen and had his music blasting through the Nuggets arena before Game 1 of the NBA Finals.
Yeah. That is my guy. My birthday is Sept. 14, and he plays a concert on my birthday in Toronto. I said I want to come onstage and sing one line of " '98 Braves." Maybe I'll sing a whole verse!

He was embroiled in some controversy when he was caught on video saying the n-word.
Wasn't no controversy for me. I heard about it. I didn't see the video. He is a friend of mine, and I don't know what happened. Obviously, it was a mistake. I think he learned from it; I think he knows better, and I don't know what was said and in what context, but I think he's an incredible human being who made a mistake.

Your story is incredible, too. You were on the street at 13. Do you think about how far you've come?
I actually don't think about it. My life is great now. I have wonderful kids and a wonderful family. I focus on the now, and hope and pray for the future. I don't look too far back. You can get lost doing that.

That being said, what advice would you give other kids in that situation?
I would never tell anybody to prove anyone else wrong. I used to be like that, and to me, it was very spiteful. Then I grew up and realized it wasn't even about proving them wrong; it was about proving myself right.

There are rumors that you're dating Shakira. Are they true?
She's an incredible human being and an incredible talent, but people just make stuff up. Just because we are friends, she lives in Miami, and her sons are basketball fans – that doesn't mean anybody's dating. Just because people hang out doesn't mean anybody's dating. But it gives everybody something to talk about, so y'all take it and run with it. She's very cool, and that's all I got!

Who are your heroes, and why?
My kids, man. I can't take them to school every single day. I can't have dinner with them every night. They sacrifice so much, and I've sacrificed so much to get to where I am today, so I can understand how hard that can be. Those kids are who I look up to. MARLOW STERN

ILLUSTRATION BY **Mark Summers**

SKECHERS x Doja Cat

Doja Cat is a trademark of Amala Dlamini

SKECHERS.COM

BACARDÍ x BOI-1DA PRESENT

MUSIC LIBERATES MUSIC

LIVE PASSIONATELY. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

© 2023. BACARDÍ, ITS TRADE DRESS, AND THE BAT DEVICEARE TRADEMARKS OF BACARDI & COMPANY LIMITED. BACARDI U.S.A. INC, CORAL GABLES, FL., RUM – 40% ALC BY VOL.